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Course Guidebook

Professor Malcolm David Eckel
Boston University



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Professor Malcolm David Eckel received a B.A. in English from Harvard College in 1968. After a year at Episcopal Divinity in Cambridge, Massachusetts, he entered Oxford University to study Theology. He received his B.A. in Theology in 1971 and his M.A. in 1975. While he was in Oxford studying the classical sources of the Christian tradition, Professor Eckel took a long journey through the major pilgrimage sites of Turkey and Iran. Out of this experience grew a fascination with the religious traditions of the Middle East and the rest of Asia.

After studying Sanskrit at Oxford, Professor Eckel returned to Harvard for a Ph.D. in Comparative Religion with special emphasis on the Buddhist traditions of India, Tibet, and Southeast Asia. As part of this program, he spent a year of research at the Institute for Advanced Study of Sanskrit in Poona, a traditional center of Sanskrit learning near Bombay. During this year, he also came to know the scholars in the Tibetan refugee community in India. He completed his Ph.D. in 1980 with a dissertation on the Madhyamaka School of Indian Buddhist philosophy.

After teaching at Ohio Wesleyan University and at Middlebury College in Vermont, Professor Eckel returned to Harvard as an assistant professor. At Harvard, he taught courses on Buddhism and Comparative Religion and was involved in the programs of Harvard Divinity School. He served as lecturer on several Harvard alumni tours of South and Southeast Asia and as Administrative Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions.

Professor Eckel tells his colleagues and friends that in 1990, at the end of his years at Harvard, he walked down to the Charles River, raised his staff, watched the waters part, and walked dryshod across the river to Boston University. The details of this story are clearly apocryphal, but the story

expresses his satisfaction with the intellectual community he has found on the southern bank of the Charles River. For the last decade at Boston University, Professor Eckel has taught courses on Buddhism, Comparative Religion, and the Religions of Asia. He also has participated in the university's core curriculum program. In 1998, he received the Metcalf Award for Teaching Excellence, the university's highest award for teaching.

In addition to many articles, Professor Eckel has published two books on Buddhist philosophy, including *To See the Buddha: A Philosopher's Quest for the Meaning of Emptiness*. He has traveled widely through the Buddhist countries of South, Southeast, and East Asia and is currently working on a book called *Metaphors Buddhist Live By*. This project explores the metaphorical connections between Buddhist thought and the practical demands of Buddhist life. ■

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Buddhism

Scope:

This course is a survey of the history of Buddhism from its origin in India in the sixth century B.C.E. to contemporary times in America. The course is meant to introduce students to the astonishing vitality and adaptability of a tradition that has transformed the civilizations of India, Southeast Asia, Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan and has now become a lively component in the cultures of Europe, Australia, and the Americas.

The course begins by exploring the religious and cultural world of the Buddha in ancient India. To understand the Buddha's contribution to the religious history of the world, it is important to know the problems he inherited and the options that were available to him to solve them. In ancient India, before the time of the Buddha, these problems were expressed in the Vedas, the body of classical Hindu scriptures. The Vedas introduce us to scholars and ritual specialists who searched for the knowledge that would free them from the cycle of death and rebirth. The Buddha inherited this quest for knowledge and directed it to his own distinctive ends.

Born as Siddhartha Gautama into a princely family in northern India about 566 B.C.E., the Buddha left his father's palace and took up the life of an Indian ascetic. The key moment in his career came after years of difficult struggle, when he sat down under a tree and "woke up" to the cause of suffering and to its final cessation. He then wandered the roads of India, gathering a group of disciples and establishing a pattern of discipline that became the foundation of the Buddhist community. The Buddha helped his disciples analyze the causes of suffering and chart their own path to *nirvana*. Finally, after a long teaching career, he died and passed quietly from the cycle of death and rebirth.

After the Buddha's death, attention shifted from the Buddha himself to the teachings and moral principles embodied in his *Dharma*. Monks gathered to recite his teachings and produced a canon of Buddhist scripture, while disputes in the early community paved the way for the diversity and

complexity of later Buddhist schools. Monks also developed patterns of worship and artistic expression that helped convey the experience of the Buddha in ritual and art.

The Buddhist King Asoka, who reigned from about 268 to 239 B.C.E., sent the first Buddhist missionaries to Sri Lanka. From this missionary effort grew the Theravada (“Tradition of the Elders”) Buddhism that now dominates all the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia with the exception of Vietnam. Asoka also left behind the Buddhist concept of a “righteous king” who gives political expression to Buddhist values. This ideal has been embodied in recent times by King Mongkut in Thailand and Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize for her nonviolent resistance to military repression in Burma.

The Indian tradition was radically transformed by two major new movements. The first was known as the Mahayana (“Great Vehicle”); the second, as Tantra or the Vajrayana (“Diamond Vehicle”). The Mahayana preached the ideal of the *bodhisattva* who postpones *nirvana* to help others escape the cycle of rebirth. Tantra developed a vivid and emotionally powerful method to achieve liberation in this life.

Buddhism entered Tibet in the seventh century and established itself as a powerful combination of Indian monasticism and Tantric practice. Tibetan Buddhism eventually developed four major schools, including the Geluk School of the Dalai Lama. Today, the fourteenth Dalai Lama carries Buddhist teaching around the world.

Buddhism entered China in the second century of the common era, at a time when the Chinese people had become disillusioned with traditional Confucian values. To bridge the gap between the cultures of India and China, Buddhist translators borrowed Taoist vocabulary to express Buddhist ideas. Buddhism took on a distinctively Chinese character, becoming more respectful of duties to the family and the ancestors, more pragmatic and this-worldly, and more consistent with traditional Chinese respect for harmony with nature. During the T’ang Dynasty (618–907), Buddhism was expressed in a series of brilliant Chinese schools, including the Ch’an School of meditation that came to be known in Japan as Zen.

Buddhism entered Japan in the sixth century of the common era and soon became allied with the power of the Japanese state. Buddhist Tantra was given distinctive Japanese expression in the Shingon School, and the Tendai School brought the sophisticated study of Chinese Buddhism to the imperial court. During the Kamakura Period (1192–1333), Japan suffered wide social and political unrest. Convinced that they were living in a “degenerate age,” the brilliant reformers Honen (1133–1212), Shinran (1173–1262), and Nichiren (1222–1282) brought a powerful new vision of Buddhism to the masses. The Kamakura Period also saw a series of brilliant Zen masters who gave new life to the ancient tradition of Buddhist meditation.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, Buddhism has become a respected part of life in countries far beyond the traditional home of Buddhism in Asia. The teaching that began on the plains of India 2,500 years ago has now been transformed in ways that would once have been unimaginable, but it still carries the feeling of serenity and freedom that we sense in the image of the Buddha himself. ■

What Is Buddhism?

Lecture 1

Through all of its many changes, what is Buddhism, and how should we study it?

In its 2,500-year history, from the time of the Buddha to the present day, Buddhism has grown from a tiny religious community in northern India into a movement that now spans the globe. It has shaped the development of civilization in India and Southeast Asia; has had major influence on the civilizations of China, Tibet, Korea, and Japan; and today has become a major part of the multi-religious world of Europe and North America. These lectures will explore the Buddhist tradition as the unfolding of a story. It is the story of the Buddha himself and the story of generations of people who have used the model of the Buddha's life to shape not only their own lives but the societies in which they live.

Buddhism originated in northern India around 500 B.C.E. The tradition gets its name from a man who was known by his followers as the Buddha, or the "Awakened One." He was born into a princely family in a region of northern India that is now in southern Nepal. He often is depicted sitting very serenely, with his feet crossed in front of him and his hands folded in his lap. He is the very picture of calm and contemplation. This is the image that has drawn people to the Buddha for many centuries, and it is the one that conveys most explicitly the experience of his awakening.

But the Buddha did not always sit still in perfect contemplation. After his awakening, he got up from his seat and taught his experience to others on the roads of northern India. The major events of the Buddha's life took place in the Madhyadesha, or the "Middle Region" of the Ganges Basin. (These sites are still the focus of Buddhist pilgrimage today.) To understand the significance of the Buddha's life, we will spend two lectures, right at the beginning of our course, studying the religious background that made it possible for the Buddha to have such a strong religious impact on Indian civilization. Then we will discuss the three categories, or "jewels," that are fundamental to Buddhist life. We will spend one lecture on the life of the

Buddha himself; two lectures on his teaching, or *dharma*; one lecture on the development of the early Buddhist community; and one lecture on the tradition of Buddhist art.

Once we have set our feet down firmly in the traditions of the early community, our challenge will be to understand the extraordinary diversity of Buddhism as it evolved in India and throughout the countries of Asia. In India itself, two major reform movements appeared that changed the face of Buddhism. The first of these was called the Mahayana, or “Great Vehicle.” The second was called Tantra, a word that is difficult to translate, but we might think of it, for the moment at least, as “power.” We will explore the Mahayana and Tantric traditions in separate lectures. Before these movements had even begun to brew in India, Buddhism was carried to Sri Lanka (the island that used to be called Ceylon) by Buddhist missionaries in the third century B.C.E. From Sri Lanka, it was carried to much of Southeast Asia, including Indonesia.

Buddhism entered China in the second century C.E., carried north by monks and merchants over the mountains of Central Asia and across the Silk Road into the heartland of China. Here it encountered a sophisticated and

ancient civilization, one that made many important changes in Buddhist life and values before Buddhism could be fully accepted as part of Chinese civilization. From China, Buddhism was eventually carried to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. In the eighth century, Buddhism was carried across the Himalayas from India to Tibet. Today, the Dalai Lama, the leader of the Tibetan Buddhist community, is one of the most visible and most active Buddhist leaders in the world. In many ways, he is not just a living symbol of Tibetan Buddhism but of Buddhism itself. We will give separate attention to



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Born into a princely family, the man known as the Buddha left his father's palace and took up the life of an Indian ascetic.

the major varieties of Buddhism in all these cultural areas. We will conclude the course with a brief look at the way Buddhism has become part of the religious world we know in our own neighborhoods in Europe or North America.

Today, Buddhism has spread through much of the rest of the world, including Europe, Australia, and the Americas. As it has interacted with new cultural traditions, it also has been transformed in surprising ways. In some places, Buddhism is strongest in ethnic communities, such as the Sri Lankan Buddhist *samgha* in Los Angeles or in the Buddhist Churches of America, a Japanese-based community on the West Coast and in Hawaii. It has become extremely influential with communities of American converts. One of the most intriguing developments in recent Buddhist history has been the appearance of a whole new generation of indigenous European and American Buddhist leaders. Some of these leaders, the nineteenth-century Theosophist Colonel Olcott or the so-called “Boston Buddhists,” led by Ernest Fenollosa, have even shaped the history of Buddhism in Asia.

This long and complex history has made the Buddhist tradition extraordinarily diverse. Some Buddhists uphold the austere tradition of self-reliance found in the early Buddhist monastic community, as in the monastic practice of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia and the Zen community in Japan. Other Buddhists feel that it is not possible to achieve salvation simply on the basis of their own efforts. They rely instead on the power of deities who have the ability to “save” worshippers from the suffering of this life. We will see an example of this tradition of salvation in the worship of Amida Buddha by Pure Land Buddhists in Japan. (Some Pure Land devotion in North America seems surprisingly similar to Christian devotion.) Chinese Buddhists often express the same kind of reverence for the *bodhisattva*, or future Buddha, Kuan-yin.

Buddhist values are not always concerned with things we would strictly call “religious.” Buddhism also has been deeply enmeshed in the political life of Buddhist societies. King Asoka, an emperor in the Maurya Dynasty in India, was converted to Buddhism in the third century B.C.E. and helped establish the ideal of a *dharma* *raja*, or “righteous king.” Asoka’s ideal has been imitated in traditional Buddhist cultures as different as Thailand,

Indonesia, China, and Japan. It is alive today in Aung San Suu Kyi's struggle for democracy and human rights in Myanmar (formerly known as Burma). A full description of a Buddhist society would have to include not just monks, nuns, and the devotees of Buddhist saviors but all the kings, queens, donors, and supporters who have oriented themselves to the ideal of the Buddha, supported Buddhist institutions, and helped spread Buddhist values throughout the world.

When we study the teaching of the Buddha, we will see that the diversity of the Buddhist tradition is no surprise. The Buddha said that everything is impermanent. The evolution of the Buddhist tradition itself exemplifies truth. The Buddha also said that nothing has any permanent identity. (This is the famous Buddhist doctrine of "no-self.") As the Buddhist tradition has changed and adapted to new situations and new needs, it sometimes has changed so radically that it is hard to know anymore what makes it "Buddhist."

In the face of this incredible diversity, is there any way to say what Buddhism actually is? It probably would be difficult to answer that question in a way that would satisfy everyone who has looked to the Buddha for guidance or everyone who has ever thought of himself or herself as a Buddhist. I am convinced, however, that we can find our way best through the complexity of Buddhism if we see it as a series of stories. This course will begin with the stories that make Indian civilization so distinctive. It will move on to the story of the Buddha as that story was remembered and transformed by generations of his followers. Then it will consider the stories of a few of the people who have used the model of the Buddha's life to shape their own lives and to shape the civilizations in which they live.

Finally, I hope the story of the Buddha and the story of Buddhism will in some way become yours as well. Buddhism can be a great challenge to people who have grown up in the Western world and think that religion has to do with the worship of a single, almighty God. The Buddha did not accept

Buddhism challenges us to think in new ways about the nature of the world and the possibility of a satisfying and productive human life.

the existence of a single God who created the world. For that matter, he did not accept the idea of a permanent self. Some people think that Buddhism is so different from all we know as religion in the Western world that it should be called a philosophy of life rather than a religion. Either way, Buddhism challenges us to think in new ways about the nature of the world and the possibility of a satisfying and productive human life. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, Introduction.

Supplementary Reading

W. Norman Brown, *Man in the Universe*.

Questions to Consider

1. When you attempt to understand a new religious tradition, what is most important to learn? Would you focus on its doctrines, the way it tells stories, its art, its rituals, or its institutions? Would you focus on something else?
2. If you were trying to explain your own religious tradition to someone who knew nothing about it, what would be the most important thing for them to learn?

India at the Time of the Buddha

Lecture 2

As the Buddha sat down under that tree, according to Buddhist tradition, he “woke up” to the truth about himself, and the truth about the nature of the world.

The story of Buddhism begins in India in the sixth century B.C.E. with the birth of Siddhartha Gautama, the man who was known as the “Awakened One,” or Buddha. What was the Buddha’s religious and cultural background? What problems did he inherit? Why did he respond to them in the way he did? To answer these questions, we begin our study of Buddhism by looking back into the Vedas, the earliest surviving scriptures of the Hindu tradition. The Vedas tell us about the lives of Indian sages and about an Indian quest for wisdom about the nature of the world and the self. When Siddhartha Gautama “woke up” to the truth and became the Buddha, this distinctive insight made him one of the most eminent and influential of these Indian sages.

This lecture will begin with a brief account of some of the distinctive features of the life of the Buddha. Then it will trace these distinctive features back into the early religious history of India. This investigation of the Buddha’s religious and cultural background has two main goals. The first goal is to understand why the Buddha chose to analyze the problems of human life in the way he did. The second goal is to learn something about religious life in India more generally. India is an extremely rich and creative place religiously. In terms of sheer numbers, India has generated more powerful religious traditions and affected the religious lives of more people than any other region in the world. The only exception would be the Middle East, with its combination of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We will understand Buddhism better if we can understand how it began as a distinctively Indian religion.

What was the ideal of the Buddha’s life? Siddhartha Gautama, the man who is recognized as the Buddha and the founder of the Buddhist tradition, was born in northern India in the sixth century B.C.E. The young man was

raised as a prince, was married, had a child, then chose to renounce his life in the palace and become a wandering ascetic. You can see ascetics like the Buddha in India today, wandering the streets with very few possessions, begging their food, and dedicating their lives to religious teaching and study. After a period of meditation and study, Siddhartha Gautama sat down under a tree and “woke up” to the truth. This experience of awakening is known as *bodhi* (Sanskrit for “awakening”), and Siddhartha Gautama is known to his followers as the “Awakened One,” or Buddha.

This basic outline of the story of the Buddha is now so familiar that it is easy to take for granted. But why would a prince choose to leave his palace in the prime of his life and take up the harsh life of an ascetic? What was he seeking? What did it mean to say that he had “awakened” to the truth? To understand the Buddhist answers to these questions, we need to know something about Siddhartha Gautama’s religious background and the religious world of India in the sixth century B.C.E.

To unpack the religious history of India, we turn first to a body of texts known as the Vedas. These are the most authoritative texts in the Hindu tradition and the oldest surviving religious texts in India. The earliest hymns in the Vedas can be dated to about 1500–1000 B.C.E. According to Hindu tradition, the Vedic hymns were “heard” by sages known as *rishis*, then passed on through an unbroken process of oral tradition. These hymns were composed (or heard) in an early form of Sanskrit, a language that is closely related to Latin, Greek, and many of the languages of Europe. Sanskrit is not an easy language, and some of it will seem unfamiliar to you. But it helps at the beginning to know that it is related to English and other European languages. The people who spoke Sanskrit, for example, called themselves the *arya*. The word, meaning simply “a noble



Image of Buddha at foot of Swayambhunath Stupa in Kathmandu Valley in Nepal.

Corel Stock Photo Library.

person,” is found in the names of two countries in the modern world. The first is Iran, and the second is Ireland, the land of the *arya* that lies out there on the edge of the north Atlantic.

Much of European civilization, like the civilization of India, is derived from the traditions of these people who migrated out of central Asia in the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. and settled as far west as Ireland and as far south as India. The hymns of the Vedas were sung to invoke and to praise the gods (*deva*). Many of these gods are related to the gods of classical Greek and Latin mythology. Dyaus, for example, is related to Zeus. The god of rain is known as Indra; the god of fire, as Agni (meaning “ignite”). These hymns were sung by the priests, or *brahmins*, as part of a complex sacrificial ritual. The priests built temporary altars, kindled sacred fires, and made offerings to the gods to invoke their aid. The sacrifices still go on today and are the core identity of the Brahmin caste, who function as the priests of India. One of the last hymns in the Vedic collection posed what I think of as the classic Vedic question. Let me summarize it so that you can get an impression of the content of these hymns and feel the force of the question:

There was not then either nonexistence or existence (either *asat* or *sat*). There was no sky, and there were no heavens. What was it that covered everything? What was its protection? Was there a bottomless depth of waters? There was neither death nor immortality, neither day nor night. The One breathed, though uninspired by breath, by its own potentiality. Beside it nothing existed...

Who is there who knows? Who can tell its origin? Who can tell the source of this creation? The gods are on this side of the creation. Who knows, then, where it came from and how it came into being?

Where this creation came from and how it came into being—perhaps the highest overseer in heaven knows, or perhaps even he does not know.

—Rig Veda 10.129
(W. Norman Brown, *Man in the Universe*, pp. 29–30)

You can see that as these early priests composed their hymns around the year 1200 B.C.E., they asked a question about the origin of the universe. The question took them, in a sense, beyond the gods.

The Upanishads tell stories of priests who tried to find unity in the fragmented world of Vedic ritual.

They wanted to know where everything came from, with emphasis on the word *know*. You can also feel just a suggestion, perhaps, that if they knew the source of everything, they would know the connection between themselves and the rest of the cosmos, and they would be able to control it.

As the Vedic tradition evolved, the original hymns of the Veda attracted a large body of commentary and explanation. The final level of commentary is found in the Upanishads, a body of texts known as the Vedanta, or “the end of the Veda.”

The Upanishads tell stories of priests who tried to find unity in the fragmented world of Vedic ritual. They focused their speculation in three areas.

- They identified the essence of external reality (or the macrocosm) as “Being” or “Reality” (*sat*).
- They identified the essence of their own personalities (or the microcosm) as “Self” (*atman*).
- They identified the essence of the sacrificial ritual (or the mesocosm) as *brahman*. The word *brahman* originally meant “prayer.” Here it refers to the power or reality that lies behind the prayer.

Once these three essential realities had been identified, the Upanishadic sages made a great imaginative leap and said that all three were aspects of the same thing. This leap of the Vedic imagination resulted in the doctrine of Upanishadic monism, the view that all of reality is one.

Upanishadic monism can be expressed positively, as it is in the story of Shvetaketu and his father, Aruni.

One day, Aruni told his son that it was time for him to take up the life of a student, and he sent him away to study. When the son came back at the age of twenty-four, feeling swell-headed and arrogant with all the things he had learned, his father asked him whether he had heard about the “principle of substitution”—“by which one hears what has not been heard of before and thinks what has not been thought of before.” Shvetaketu says that he has not, and Aruni begins to teach him.

“It is like this,” he said. “By means of one lump of clay one would perceive everything made of clay—the transformation is a verbal handle, a name—while the reality is just this: ‘It’s clay.’”

Then he applies this principle in a series of discourses that sound to us like philosophical poetry:

The bees, my dear son, prepare honey by gathering the nectar of different trees and reducing that nectar to a unity. So that the nectar from each different tree is not able to differentiate: “I am the nectar of this tree” and “I am the nectar of that tree.” In exactly the same way, my son, when all creatures merge into reality, they are not aware that “We are merging into reality.” No matter what they are in this world—whether they are a tiger, a lion, a wolf, a boar, a worm, a moth, a gnat, or a mosquito—they all merge into that reality. That finest essence here is the self of the whole world. That is reality; that is the self. And that art thou, Shvetaketu.

—Chandogya Upanishad

(Robert Ernest Hume, trans., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*,
2nd ed. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1931: p. 246)

Upanishadic monism also can be expressed negatively, as in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad: “About this self, one can only say that it is not this, and it is not that.” Regardless of how the Upanishads expressed this monistic doctrine, the goal was to develop knowledge of reality.

The Buddha inherited this traditional Indian quest for knowledge. The Buddhist quest for knowledge shared three important characteristics with the quest that was expressed in the Upanishads. This knowledge was intended to bring unity to three areas of life:

- External reality;
- The self;
- The ritual or symbolic practices that united the self with the world around it.

This quest for knowledge was not merely intellectual. It did not just change the way people thought or acted; it changed their very identities. As the text of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says, “If a person knows ‘I am Brahman’ in this way, he becomes the whole world.”

Finally, this quest had to do with the challenge of overcoming death, as in the story of the encounter between Nachiketas and Yama (the Lord of Death) in the Katha Upanishad.

When Nachiketas was sent to meet the Lord of Death, the Lord of Death gave him a well-known teaching about the immortal soul:

The wise one is not born and does not die;
 He does not come from anywhere;
 He does not become anyone.
 He is unborn, eternal, primeval, and everlasting,
 And he is not killed when the body is killed.

—Katha Upanishad 1.18
 (Patrick Olivelle, trans., *Upanishads*, p. 237)

With this knowledge, it was possible for Nachiketas to overcome the power of death.

We will see that the Buddha developed a very different idea of the nature of the self, but his goal was similar to the goal of Nachiketas. He wanted to know the nature of the self so that he could be released from the power of death. ■

Essential Reading

Brown, *Man in the Universe*, Introduction and chapter 1.

Supplementary Reading

Olivelle, *Upanishads*, Introduction and pp. 52–72, 148–156.

Questions to Consider

1. Religious traditions often begin with a question about the nature of reality: Religious people want to know what is truly real. What are some of the ways we answer that question in our own culture?
2. How would your answer to that question affect the way you live?

The Doctrine of Reincarnation

Lecture 3

Along with the Indian quest for wisdom, the Buddha inherited a basic Indian assumption about the nature of life: Human beings, like all other living creatures, lived not just one life, but came back into this world again and again in a continuous process of death and rebirth.

The early Vedic view of the afterlife was similar to the view found in some ancient European traditions. People who live virtuous lives go to live in the “land of the ancestors” when they die. This belief persists in some aspects of Hinduism today. When families make their pilgrimage to Banaras, for example, they make offerings to feed the ancestors and ensure their prosperity in the afterlife. Sometime during the first half of the first millennium B.C.E., this ancient view began to be replaced by a doctrine of reincarnation.

By the time of the classical Upanishads, sages took the position that human beings did not live just one life, but cycled around again and again, life after life, in a process of death and rebirth. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, a sage named Yajñavalkya compares the succession of human lives to the movement of a caterpillar from one blade of grass to another: “It is like this. As a caterpillar, when it comes to the tip of a blade of grass, reaches out to a new foothold and draws itself onto it, so the self (*atman*), after it has knocked down this body and rendered it unconscious, reaches out to a new foothold and draws itself onto it.” Later, the same text says that when human beings are cremated, they rise up into the sky. There, they can move in three directions: to the realm of Brahman, back into this world as human beings, or into the body of a worm, an insect, or a snake. This doctrine is known in English as reincarnation, transmigration, or rebirth. In Sanskrit it is called *samsara*, which means simply “wandering” from one life to the next.

The doctrine of reincarnation affected Indian religious thought in two important ways. In the earliest texts, this doctrine is depicted as a rare and secret teaching, but soon it became the fundamental assumption of

Indian religious life. Students of Indian religion often are surprised by how widespread and basic this assumption is when they visit India for the first time and begin to talk to Indian teachers. In the West, reincarnation is often viewed as an opportunity to experience things that were missed in this life. In India, reincarnation came to be viewed as a burden rather than as an opportunity. A good illustration of the burdensome nature of *samsara* is a story about the god Indra and a Brahmin boy.

If *samsara* is considered fundamental and is also a burden, how can a person deal with it? The answer is to follow the law of *karma*, the law that governs the passage from one life to the next. The word *karma* means “action,” particularly the kind of moral action that affects a person’s fate in a future life. According to the law of *karma*, good actions bring a good rebirth in a future life, and bad actions bring a bad rebirth. Rebirth can generally take place in one of six realms: as a god, demigod, human being, ghost, animal, or spirit in hell. These realms are vividly displayed in textbooks and paintings to show the punishments that confront evildoers in future lives.

The law of *karma* allows two strategies to deal with the problem of *samsara*. According to the ordinary norm (followed by most Indian people), a person attempts to perform good

action to achieve a better rebirth, such as rebirth in heaven. This rebirth, like all the results of *karma*, is impermanent. According to the extraordinary norm (followed by only a few religious specialists), a person attempts to



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The Wheel of Rebirth represents the endless cycle of reincarnation that has long been part of Indian religious thought and Buddhism.

perform no action, either good or bad. The goal is not a better rebirth, but no rebirth at all. The state of no rebirth, called *moksha* (liberation) or *nirvana*, is permanent. Once a person has achieved this state, there is no return in the cycle of death and rebirth.

With the two norms come two distinctive styles of life in Indian society. People who follow the ordinary norm situate themselves in a network of duties and responsibilities. They are mothers or fathers, teachers or students, priests or kings, and they are bound by the rules that govern each of these social roles. People who follow the extraordinary norm “renounce” these duties and give up their established roles in Indian society. The renunciants (*sannyasis* or *bhikshus* and *bhikshunis*) have few possessions, often beg for their food, and live lives of deliberate simplicity to escape the network of *karma* that ties them in the cycle of *samsara*. When Siddhartha Gautama left the palace and became a wandering ascetic, he chose to follow the extraordinary norm in the hope of freeing himself from the cycle of death and rebirth. ■

Essential Reading

Brown, *Man in the Universe*, chapters 2–4.

Supplementary Reading

Olivelle, *Upanishads*, Introduction and pp. 52–72, 148–156.

Strong, *Experience of Buddhism*, selections 1.5.1–1.5.2.

Questions to Consider

1. Why do you suppose the doctrine of reincarnation seems so self-evidently true in India? Does it have anything to do with the way Indian society is organized?
2. How would you live your life differently if you took seriously the Indian view of reincarnation?

The Story of the Buddha

Lecture 4

With the simple events of the Buddha's life as a guide, Buddhists have developed a rich tradition of stories and legends that tell us not only how they have understood the founder of their tradition, but how they have built lives of wisdom and freedom for themselves.

When a person encounters Buddhism for the first time, it is natural to ask two questions: Who was the Buddha? How did the story of the Buddha become woven into the lives of the people who call themselves Buddhists? This lecture will do two things: (1) Tell the life story of the Buddha. (2) Reflect about the way that story has been mirrored in the lives of Buddhist people throughout Asia and the rest of the world.

Historically, we can hold onto a few key facts about the Buddha's life. He was born into the family of King Shuddhodana and Queen Maya about the year 566 B.C.E. in a region of the Indian subcontinent that now lies in southern Nepal. He was a member of the Shakya tribe; his clan name was Gautama and his given name was Siddhartha. It is common to refer to him as Siddhartha Gautama, or even more commonly, as Shakyamuni, "The Sage of the Shakya Tribe." These facts tell us that the Buddha was not a figment of someone's imagination: He was real human being. But these facts do not tell us much about what the Buddha did or about the impact he had on his followers. To learn about the Buddha this way, we have to turn to the stories Buddhists tell about the Buddha.

There is a rich body of Buddhist stories about the Buddha. When Buddhists tell the story of the Buddha, they begin with his previous lives. Stories about the Buddha's previous lives are told in texts known as *jataka*, or "birth tales." Most of these stories convey simple moral lessons, often in a form that is accessible to children. An example is the story of the monkey, the elephant, and the partridge. In a technical sense, these stories are not about the Buddha but about a "future Buddha," known as a *bodhisattva*.

Stories about the Buddha's life contain several key episodes. These episodes are widely represented in Buddhist art and have had an important influence on the way Buddhists imagine an ideal human life. The birth of the future Buddha was surrounded by miraculous signs indicating that he would become a *chakravartin*, or a "turner of the wheel." A *chakravartin* either becomes a great king and turns the wheel of conquest or becomes a religious teacher and turns the wheel of *dharma*, or religious teaching. The wheel of the *dharma* has become the international symbol of Buddhism. Siddhartha's father tried to protect him from the suffering of the world in the hope that he would become a great king. He was raised as a prince, was married, and had a child.

In his early thirties, he traveled outside the palace and saw four sights: a sick person, an old person, a corpse, and an ascetic. These sights inspired him to renounce life in the palace and become an ascetic. He began by following a path of severe fasting and self-discipline. He found that this was unproductive, and he adopted a mode of discipline known as the Middle Path, avoiding the extremes of self-denial and self-indulgence. Self-indulgence refers not just to the way people live, but also to the way they think, including the way they think about themselves.

In Buddhist philosophy, the self is not so important that you need to hold on to it, nor is it so trivial that you can just throw it away. Following this mode of discipline, the prince sat down under a tree and, with intense meditation, woke up to the truth. With this experience, he became a Buddha, someone who has "awakened" from the dream of ignorance, someone whose wisdom has "blossomed" like a flower. When Siddhartha became a Buddha, he also achieved the state or the goal that Buddhists call *nirvana*. *Nirvana* means "to extinguish" or "to blow out." A Buddha is someone who has understood



Artistic rendering of the birth of the Buddha.

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the causes of suffering and has “blown them out,” meaning that he no longer suffers from the ignorance and desire that feed the fire of death and rebirth. *Nirvana* involves a sense of freedom and calm that is missing from ordinary life in this world.

From the tree of his awakening, the Buddha walked to Sarnath, in the outskirts of Banaras, and turned the wheel of his *dharma* by preaching about his realization to a small group of his former companions. Among the many stories about this phase of the Buddha’s life is the story of Angulimala (“Garland of Fingers”), a serial killer who collected his victims’ fingers. He meets the Buddha, is stricken with remorse, and becomes a member of the Buddha’s monastic community. At the age of about eighty, after a long and productive teaching career, the Buddha lay down between two trees and passed gently from the realm of death and rebirth. This event is called his *parinirvana*, or “complete extinction.” After the Buddha’s death, his body was cremated, and his relics were enshrined in reliquary mounds, or *stupas*. These *stupas* became the models for a tradition of Buddhist worship.

**A Buddha is someone
who has understood
the causes of
suffering and has
“blown them out.”**

What kind of teacher was the Buddha? The Buddha was a human being who tried to confront the fundamental problems of suffering and death and follow them to a solution. As he did this, he located himself in a tradition of Indian asceticism. In spite of its distinctive Indian origin, this tradition of asceticism has proved to be extremely adaptable and has had a great effect on other Asian cultures. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 1.

Supplementary Reading

Strong, *Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 1.

Questions to Consider

1. The story of the Buddha is so familiar that it is easy to take it for granted, but it represents a very distinctive cultural image of an ideal human life. Do any features of the story that seem surprising or problematic?
2. The concept of freedom is a central value in many cultures. Do you think that the story of the Buddha gives a convincing picture of freedom?

All Is Suffering

Lecture 5

Accounts of the Buddha's teaching begin with the simple claim that "All is suffering."

The death of the Buddha left his followers with a difficult problem. During his life, the Buddha had been a focus of veneration and a source of authority. When the Buddha not only had died but had left the realm of rebirth altogether, what was left to fill the void? Buddhists have typically given two answers to this question. For those who wanted to venerate or worship the Buddha, the Buddha has left behind a "form body." Initially, the form body comprised the relics of the Buddha's cremation. Over time, any physical sign or representation of the Buddha came to play the same role, including objects the Buddha touched, places he visited, and images of the Buddha's form. For those who wanted to follow the Buddha's example, he left behind his *dharma*, the teaching that expressed the content of his awakening and showed the way for others to achieve this realization for themselves.

Out of this distinction between the Buddha's physical body and the body of his teaching grew a theory of the two bodies of the Buddha. This theory is similar, in some respects, to the Christian distinction between the two natures of Christ. Christians say that Christ is fully human and also fully divine. Buddhists say that the Buddha has two bodies: a physical, or "form body," that arises and passes away like any other part of this changeable and transient world and a *dharma* body that is eternal and does not change. It is misleading, however, to think that the Buddha is divine with respect to either of these two bodies.

The topic of discussion in this lecture is the Buddha's *dharma*. The *dharma* was the Buddha's most important legacy to his followers, and it is the most useful way for us to try to understand the content of his awakening.

In the “Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of *Dharma*” (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*), the traditional summary of the Buddha’s first sermon, the Buddha’s teaching is summarized in Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are: (1) The truth of suffering (*dukkha*). (2) The truth of the arising of suffering. (3) The truth of the cessation of suffering (also known as *nirvana* or *nibbana*). (4) The truth of the path that leads to the cessation of suffering.

The terms *dukkha* and *nibbana* are given in Pali, the language of the earliest Buddhist scriptures. Pali is best understood as a vernacular form of Sanskrit. (When we discuss the Mahayana in a later lecture, we will return to Sanskrit.) Some say that all four of the Noble Truths are contained by implication in the truth of suffering.

The truth of suffering is expressed in the simple claim that “All is suffering.” When people come to the Buddhist tradition for the first time, they often interpret this claim to mean that the Buddha was pessimistic. Our job is to understand how this simple statement about suffering leads not to pessimism but to a sense of liberation and peace.

Traditional sources say that “All is suffering” in one of three ways. (1) *Dukkha-dukkha* (suffering that is obviously suffering): some things cause obvious physical or mental pain. (2) *Viparinama-dukkha* (suffering due to change): even the most pleasurable things cause suffering when they pass away. (3) *Samkhara-dukkha* (suffering due to conditioned states): pleasurable things can cause pain even in the midst of the pleasure, if the pleasure is based on an illusion about the nature of the object or about the nature of the self.

These three kinds of suffering can be illustrated by creating a parable about a car. A car causes *dukkha-dukkha* if you drive it into the back of a bus. A car causes *viparinama-dukkha* if you drive it through a New England winter and watch it disintegrate in the snow and salt. A car causes *samkhara-dukkha* if you think there is something in yourself or in the car that will be enhanced by attachment to the car. The significance of these three kinds of suffering can be explained by relating them to the three “marks” of existence. Everything

is suffering. Everything is impermanent. Nothing has any self, or “all is no self” (*anatta*).

What do Buddhists mean when they say that there is no self? In traditional Buddhism, “no self” means that no permanent identity continues from one moment to the next. This claim poses an obvious problem: If there is no self, what makes up the human personality? The answer to this question is: five “aggregates,” from material form (*rupa*) to consciousness (*viññāna*). These five aggregates are only momentary, but they group together to give the illusion of permanence, like the flow of a river or the flame of a candle.

**If there is no self,
what is reborn?**

If there is no self, what is reborn? The answer is the “stream” or “flame” of consciousness (*viññāna*). Because of the causal continuity between moments in the flame, it is possible to say that I am the “same” person from one moment to the next. But when we look closely at the flame, we realize that it changes every moment, and the idea that one moment is the same as another is nothing but an illusion.

Is this view of human life pessimistic? The doctrine of no self helps us understand why the doctrine of suffering is not as pessimistic as it seems. From a Buddhist point of view, it is simply realistic to accept that the human personality and all of reality is constantly changing. The cause of suffering is not the change itself, but the human desire to hold on to things and keep them from changing. When Buddhists look at the world through the lens of no self, they do not approach it in a pessimistic way. They understand that if everything changes, then it is possible for everything to become new. If they accept the doctrine of suffering, it is possible to approach even the most difficult situations in life with a feeling of lightness and freedom.

This doctrine is also related in a very precise way to the quest for *nirvana*. In my lecture on the Indian understanding of reincarnation, I pretended that I was writing the phrase “I act” on the blackboard, then crossed it out piece by piece. Now we can understand what it means for a Buddhist to cross out the word “I.” Buddhists can begin to erase this word by realizing that there

is no permanent self to hold onto or protect. Just a hint of this realization is enough to start unraveling the chain of causes that bind people to the cycle of *samsara* and get them moving on the path to *nirvana*. ■

Essential Reading

Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, chapter 2.

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 2.

Supplementary Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 3, sections 1–2.

Questions to Consider

1. People often have difficulty grasping what Buddhists mean when they say that there is no self. Is there a good analogy that would make this concept clear?
2. Why is it so attractive to think that there is no self? Would this be a dangerous idea if it were understood in the wrong way?
3. Do Buddhists have a way of protecting themselves against these dangers?

The Path to *Nirvana*

Lecture 6

The cessation of suffering is also called *nirvana*, the “blowing out” of desire.

The second Noble Truth is the origin or arising of suffering. The origin of suffering is explained by a causal sequence known as the “twelfold chain of dependent arising” (*paticca-samuppada*). The most important links in this chain show a process that leads from ignorance to birth. Ignorance leads to desire. Desire leads to birth. To understand what Buddhists have in mind when they make this series of connections, you might take a glossy advertisement from a magazine and ask what kinds of illusions it fosters, what kinds of desires it is meant to arouse, and what comes into being as a result of those desires. Most of these desires are quite benign, of course, but they feed the creative process that, for Buddhists, leads to more death and rebirth. The most fundamental form of ignorance, of course, is that “I” constitute a permanent ego that needs to be fed by new and desirable experiences or new and desirable objects.

The third Noble Truth is cessation, or *nirvana*. When someone starts to cultivate an awareness of no self and strips away the desires that feed the fire of *samsara*, it is possible eventually for the fire of *samsara* to burn out. This is not easy, and it may take many lifetimes. But it is possible for anyone to achieve the same cessation of *samsara* that was experienced by the Buddha himself.



Golden Buddha, Schwedagon Pagoda, Burma.

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This cessation is known by the name *nirvana* (Pali: *nibbana*). *Nirvana* means to “blow out,” like the flame of a candle. It can be understood as the “blowing out” of desire, the “blowing out” of ignorance, or the “blowing out” of life itself, if life is understood as the constant cycle of death and rebirth. *Nirvana* comes at two moments: at the moment of awakening, when the Buddha understood that he was no longer adding fuel to the fire of his personality, and at the moment of *parinirvana*, when the fire of his personality finally flickered out. These two moments are called “*nirvana* with residues” and “*nirvana* without residues.”

It is possible for anyone to achieve the same cessation of *samsara* that was experienced by the Buddha himself.

Like the concept of suffering, *nirvana* seems at first to be quite negative. People often ask: If *nirvana* is just an experience of cessation, why do Buddhists find it so desirable? The first way to answer this question is to understand that *nirvana* forces us to take seriously the negative

Indian evaluation of *samsara*. If *samsara* really is something to be avoided, then the most positive thing to do about it is simply to negate it, to bring it to an end. *Nirvana* is this negation. This view of *nirvana* as cessation stands in sharp contrast to the Jewish and Christian concept of a God who created the world out of nothing. According to Jewish and Christian tradition, God once faced “nothing” and made something come to be. The Buddha did the opposite. He faced a situation in which death and rebirth had been going on from time without beginning and found a way to bring one small part of it to an end.

A second way to explain the appeal of *nirvana* is to understand that the experience of *nirvana* is not limited just to the moment of the Buddha’s death. The Buddha also experienced *nirvana* at the moment of his awakening, when he knew that he was no longer bound by the ignorance and desire that fuel *samsara*. When it is understood this way, *nirvana* is not just the cessation of life. It is a quality of mind or a state of being that characterized the Buddha’s life in the forty years between his awakening and his *parinirvana*. During

this time, the Buddha exemplified many positive characteristics: He was peaceful, wise, unattached, and free. We might also imagine that he was able to act with a certain spontaneity and clarity of mind, perhaps even with a certain compassion for the suffering of others.

The Path to *Nirvana* is often divided into eight categories: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. The logic of the path is clearer, however, if we reduce these eight categories to three: (1) *sila*, or moral conduct *samadihi*, or mental concentration; (2) *pañña*, or wisdom; and (3) Buddhist lay people observe five moral precepts (*sila*): no killing, no stealing, no lying, no abuse of sex, and no drinking intoxicants.

Monks observe five more, including the restrictions that they cannot eat after twelve noon, cannot sleep on soft beds, and cannot handle gold or silver. Buddhist practitioners engage in mental concentration (*samadhi*) to focus and clarify the mind. They also cultivate wisdom (*pañña*) or the understanding of no self. These three modes of discipline are meant to avoid the *karma* that will lead a person to difficult and dangerous forms of rebirth. They also are meant to cultivate the qualities of wisdom and detachment that eventually led to the Buddha's experience of awakening. ■

Essential Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 3, sections 3–6.

Supplementary Reading

Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, chapters 3 ff.

Questions to Consider

1. Western religious traditions, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, emphasize the idea of God the creator: God once looked out on the formless void and made something come into being. This has produced a preference for ideas of creativity and of being. Do the Western religious traditions that are familiar to you place any value on an experience of “cessation”? Would it be better if they did?
2. The Buddhist Path is meant to lead a person to *nirvana* and to the cessation of rebirth. How is the Path structured to help Buddhists achieve this goal? How would it change a person’s life, even if he or she did not have the goal of *nirvana* in mind?

The Buddhist Monastic Community

Lecture 7

Over the course of a long and productive teaching career, the Buddha laid the foundation for Buddhist monasticism, including both monks and nuns, as well as a sophisticated tradition of lay devotion and support.

A fundamental expression of Buddhist faith is the “triple refuge”: I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the *dharmā*, and I take refuge in the *sangha*. In the last three lectures, we talked about the Buddha and the *dharmā*. It is time now to consider some of the factors that shaped the early Buddhist community. As the Buddha wandered from town to town during his long teaching career, he gathered together a large and diverse community of followers, including not just monks like Angulimala, but a community of nuns and lay supporters.

The role of an ideal lay person is often represented by the figure of Anāpāṇḍita, the donor, or *danapati*, who purchased a pleasure grove for use by the Buddha and his community of monks. Generosity is not included as one of the five moral precepts, but for lay people, generosity is a fundamental virtue. Generosity makes it possible for monks and nuns to live the monastic life, and it gives lay people an opportunity to live the ideal of renunciation in their own distinctive way.

The Buddha created an order of nuns when he agreed to ordain Mahāprajāpatī, his great aunt. The Buddha insisted that the nuns abide by several additional restrictions and occupy a rank inferior to that of the monks. It was possible, however, for nuns to achieve awakening and *nirvāṇa*, just as the monks could. The community of nuns thrived in the early history of Buddhism and was important in the tradition’s early expansion to other parts of Asia. Today, communities of nuns are found principally in China, Tibet, and Korea.

The monastic community began as a group of wanderers, but they soon evolved a settled pattern of life.

The monastic community began as a group of wanderers, but they soon evolved a settled pattern of life, at least during a portion of the year. The rainy season, which arrives in northern India during the months of June or July, made the roads impassable and forced the monks to take refuge where they could be supported by a stable group of lay followers. At first, these were just temporary dwelling places, but they soon evolved into settled monasteries (*vihara*), where monks and nuns stayed not just for the rainy season but for the entire year. This pattern of monasticism, with its circle of lay supporters, has become the basic structure of Buddhist society and the bearer of Buddhist values.

After the Buddha's death, the community confronted a problem of authority. When the Buddha died, the senior monks convened a council to recite the Buddha's teaching and create an authoritative body of doctrine and discipline. Ananda recited the Buddha's doctrinal teachings. These became the *Sutta-pitaka*, the "basket of discourses."

Upali recited the Buddha's rules and regulations. These became the *Vinaya-pitaka*, the "basket of discipline." Eventually, these were supplemented by a third basket, the *Abhidhamma*, which contained systematic reflection on the Buddha's teaching. Together, these constitute the "three baskets" (*tripitaka*). It is common to call these three baskets a canon of Buddhist "scripture," although they were not written down for several centuries after the Buddha's death.

The contents of the Buddhist scriptures often are quite simple and pragmatic. Discourses of the Buddha begin with a formula drawn from the oral tradition: "Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was dwelling at...and he said..." The discourses of the Buddha often have a simple, down-to-earth



Buddhist nuns at prayer at Geden Choling Nunnery.

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style and present a pragmatic approach to religious truth. “The Discourse on the Turning of the Wheel of the *Dharma*” is considered the Buddha’s first sermon, delivered after the Buddha had walked from the seat of his awakening and encountered a group of his old associates in Sarnath, near the city of Banaras.

The sermon begins with the teaching of the Middle Path:

Oh, Bhikkhus [Oh, monks], these two extremes ought not to be practiced by those who have gone forth from the household life. What are these two? There is devotion to the indulgence of sense pleasures, which is low, common, the way of ordinary people, unworthy and unprofitable; and there is devotion to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy and unprofitable. Avoiding these two extremes, the Buddha has realized the Middle Path: it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to calm, to insight, to awakening, to *nibbana*.

—(Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, p. 92)

The sermon then goes on to an account of the Four Noble Truths.

One of the simplest of the early sermons, and in my view one of the most effective, is the Fire Sermon. The Buddha begins by saying: “Bhikkhus, all is burning. And what is the all that is burning? Bhikkhus, the eye is burning, visible forms are burning, visual consciousness is burning... Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion.” The Buddha goes on to talk in the same way about the other senses.

The story of Malunkyaputta and the arrow is often used as an example of the Buddha’s concern for practical solutions to human problems rather than for a kind of fruitless doctrinal controversy. Malunkyaputta wanted the Buddha to tell him whether the world was eternal or not eternal, finite or infinite; whether the soul was the same as the body; and whether the Buddha existed after death. The Buddha responded by comparing Malunkyaputta to a man who is shot by an arrow and will not let someone pull it out until he can

tell him who shot the arrow, what it was made of, and so on. The Buddha said that Malunkyaputta should be concerned with removing the arrow of suffering rather than with useless doctrinal speculations.

The Buddha's teaching also is expressed in simple, easily memorized verses, as in the collection known as the *Dhammapada* or "The Words of the Teaching." When I read these sayings, I often am impressed by how pithy they are and how they seem to convey the simplicity of the Buddha's teaching. For example:

Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind, this is the teaching of the Buddha.

You are your own protector. What other protector can there be? With yourself fully controlled, you obtain a protection that is hard to obtain.

There are a few people who cross to the other shore. The others merely run up and down the bank on this side.

(Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, pp. 125-136)

The Second Buddhist Council led to the beginnings of Buddhist sectarianism. As the community expanded across northern India, monks began to adapt the teaching to new situations and encountered much greater difficulty enforcing unanimity in doctrine or discipline. About a hundred years after the death of the Buddha, a dispute in the *samgha* provoked a second Buddhist council. Historical accounts of this council are contradictory; it is difficult to be certain either about the source of the controversy or about its outcome. One account says that the controversy was provoked by the scandalous behavior of a monk named Mahadeva. Another says that it was provoked by disagreement over two prohibitions in traditional monastic discipline: One prevented monks and nuns from using gold and silver; the other prevented them from carrying salt from one day to the next.

Out of this dispute came a split between two major parties. The party known as the Sthaviravada, or “Doctrine of the Elders,” was the predecessor of the Theravada tradition that now dominates the Buddhist countries of Southeast Asia (with the exception of Vietnam). The party known as the Mahasamghika, or “Great Community,” was the predecessor of the Mahayana tradition that now dominates the Buddhist countries of North and East Asia. These disputes eventually gave rise to eighteen schools (*nikaya*), only one of which still survives in its traditional form. The sole surviving school is the Theravada (Pali for Sthaviravada) tradition of Southeast Asia. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 3.

Supplementary Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 3.

Questions to Consider

1. What are the distinctive features of Buddhist social organization?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of this social system?

Buddhist Art and Architecture

Lecture 8

Religious traditions do not communicate merely through words; they also use the language of image, space, and form.

In the centuries immediately following the Buddha's death, the Buddha was represented (or indicated) by shrines—*cetiya* [Pali], *caitya* [Sanskrit]—containing the relics of the Buddha or related in some other way to the events of the Buddha's life. The most basic shrine was the *stupa*, a solid reliquary mound containing relics in a square structure at the top. Other shrines contained objects touched by the Buddha, such as his begging bowl. A common form of shrine was dedicated to the Buddha's footprints. These shrines often functioned as the focus of Buddhist pilgrimage.

Lay people worshipped at these shrines as a way of gaining merit or good *karma*. Worshippers used the traditional gestures of Indian worship (*pūja*), such as offerings of fruit, flowers, incense, or a flame. They also “took the *darshan*” or “saw” the shrine in a powerful or emotionally significant way. Strictly speaking, a monk or a nun would not use these shrines as a way to gain merit, because the goal of monastic life was to escape *samsara*. They would use the shrines, instead, as the focus of meditation to follow the Buddha's example. But the distinction between lay and monastic practice

was not always strictly observed. Buddhists do not believe that the Buddha is actually present in his images. Instead, they use Buddha images as a way of tapping into the Buddha's power.

Lay people worshipped at these shrines as a way of gaining merit or good *karma*.

The earliest sculptural representations of the Buddha are sometimes referred to as “aniconic” images. They represent the Buddha by his symbols, by places associated with his life, or simply by his absence. For example, we often see images of lay people bowing down in devotion to the *bodhi* tree and the throne of the Buddha's awakening. These images were quite common in the early centuries of the common era at sites in Andhra Pradesh, in

south central India. Similar images are visible on one of the most important early Buddhist monuments—the *stupa* at Sanchi. Some scholars dispute the meaning of these images. Some say these images are evidence of a tradition that prohibited representation of the Buddha's physical form. Others say that they do not represent the Buddha but represent shrines associated with the Buddha after his death.

Near the beginning of the common era, craftsmen began to create images of the Buddha's form. Images in the Mathura style are associated with the region of Mathura in the Ganges Basin. These style often have a large, fleshy body, typical of an indigenous Indian way of expressing the form of the human body. One of the earliest images is a seated Buddha from Ishapur, Mathura, Shaka Period (first century B.C.E.). The Buddha image from Abhicchatra, Uttar Pradesh (ca. 152 C.E., National Museum, New Delhi) has a distinctive quality of buoyancy. While it is very solid, it also seems to float.

The Gandhara style is associated with the region of Gandhara, now on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Buddha images in this style show the influence of Greek craftsmen who worked in the kingdoms that were Hellenized by Alexander the Great. This Hellenistic style is particularly evident in the drapery of the robes and the muscular anatomy. One example of this style represents the Buddha's victory over Mara, the tempter. Another striking example shows an emaciated Buddha during the austere period before he took the Middle Path (Kushana Period, Sikri, Pakistan). An image of the Buddha's first sermon deer in the audience (Kushana Period, Indian Museum, Calcutta, India). There are also images of



Sacred Bodhi tree in Kathmandu, Nepal.

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the Buddha's *parinirvana*—the reclining Buddha at the moment of his death (Kushana Period, Indian Museum, Calcutta, India).

The Mathura and Gandhara styles came together to create the classic Gupta style (fourth to sixth centuries). Buddha images in the Gupta style are more fluid and graceful. The Buddha's body is more slender, the drapery of his robe is depicted as a series of fine folds, and the expression on his face is more delicate and refined. Examples include the standing Buddha from Jamalpur, Mathura, ca. mid-fifth century (Mathura Museum, Mathura), and the seated Buddha from Sarnath, Uttar Pradesh, ca. 475 (Sarnath Museum, Sarnath). This period also produced the monumental Buddha images at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, recently destroyed by the Taliban government. ■

Essential Reading

Craven, *Indian Art*, chs. 6–7.

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 1, section 8.

Supplementary Reading

Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*, chapters 5, 8, 10–12.

Questions to Consider

1. How do the sculptural representations of the Buddha supplement or enhance your understanding of what a Buddha is and what the Buddha has meant to members of the Buddhist community?
2. It is common to represent the Buddha in the posture of teaching. If you were standing in front of an image of a teaching Buddha, how does it teach you? What message does it convey?

Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia

Lecture 9

During the history of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia, a close relationship has existed between the Buddhist *sangha* and Buddhist political leaders.

In the last two lectures, we have considered two of the ways Buddhism changed as it expanded out of its homeland in the north of India. Disputes in the *sangha* generated a series of sectarian movements known as *nikayas*. Buddhist artists developed different ways of representing the concept of the Buddha in visual form. Many of the early sectarian movements, like many of the early Buddhist artistic styles, are now historical artifacts. We can study them in museums or read about them in texts, but we cannot meet them on the street. One of the early sects, however, is still active: the Theravada (“Doctrine of the Elders”) tradition of Southeast Asia.

This lecture offers a taste of the history of the Theravada by looking at a series of representative figures who have shaped the development of the Theravada tradition as we know it today. These figures are:

- King Asoka, who became the prototype of the “righteous king” (*dharmaraja*) and whose son, according to Buddhist legend, became the first Buddhist missionary to Sri Lanka.
- King Mongkut of Thailand (r. 1851–1868), who spent twenty-five years as a monk and then, as king, instituted a reform movement to modernize Thai monastic life.
- Aung San Suu Kyi, the leader of a democratic protest movement in Burma, who was the recipient of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

Asoka (reigned 269–238 B.C.E.) was the prototype of a “righteous king” (*dharmaraja*). When King Asoka assumed the throne in 269 B.C.E. as emperor of the Maurya Dynasty, he waged a bloody campaign to conquer the kingdom of Kalinga. The brutality of this campaign provoked Asoka

to convert to Buddhism. After his conversion, Asoka proclaimed himself a “righteous king” (*dharmaraja*), or protector of the *dharma*. He advocated a policy of conquest by *dharma* (*dharmavijaya*) rather than by force of arms. Asoka’s position was recorded in a series of Rock Edicts placed at strategic spots around his empire.

Rock Edict XIII gives an account of his conversion:

Eight years after his coronation, King Devanampriya Priyadarshi [Asoka] conquered Kalinga. One hundred and fifty thousand persons were deported, one hundred thousand were killed, and many times that number perished. Now that the Kalingans have been taken, Devanampriya is zealous in his study of Dharma. Devanampriya feels sorrow at having conquered the Kalingans...

Indeed, Devanampriya wishes all beings to be safe, restrained, and even-keeled in the face of violence. For Devanampriya considers the foremost form of conquest to be Dharma-conquest.

—(Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, pp. 84–85)

Other Rock Edicts talk about Asoka’s policy to promote the *dharma*:

King Devanampriya Priyadarshi says: I have had banyan trees planted along the roads to provide shade for beasts and people, and I have had mango groves planted. And I have had wells dug and rest areas built every mile, and here and there I have had watering holes made for the enjoyment of beasts and humans...Of course, previous kings as well have sought to please the people with such facilities, but I am doing this so that people may follow the path of Dharma.

—(Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, p. 85)

King Asoka sent out missionaries to spread the Buddha’s teaching, and his actions have served as a model for “righteous kings” throughout the Buddhist world. A righteous king protects and promulgates the *dharma*. In return, the

king is recognized or “legitimated” by the religious authority of the monks. In some situations, the king disciplines and reforms the *samgha* to make sure that it adheres to proper discipline and does not interfere in the affairs of the state. Asoka himself set an example for the control and discipline of the *samgha* when he said:

Any monk or nun who causes a schism in the Samgha will have to wear the white robes of a layperson and will no longer be able to dwell in a monastic residence. This order should be made known to both the community of monks and the community of nuns...and a copy of this edict shall be given to the laity.

—(Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, p. 85.)

One of the most striking examples of a righteous king in modern history is King Rama IV or King Mongkut of Thailand (r. 1851–1868). King Mongkut served as a monk for over twenty-five years before ascending the throne. As king, he believed that Thai monastic life needed to be reformed, purged of “superstitious” practices, and returned to the pristine model of the Pali canon. He gave institutional form to his ideas by creating the Thammayut movement in the Thai *samgha*. During the reign of his son, King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910), this reform movement was extended throughout the Thai *samgha* and given the status of official orthodoxy.

Thailand continues to be an example of the close alliance between king and *samgha* in the extension and protection of Buddhist values. Important symbols of the connection between royal power and Buddhist practice in Bangkok include the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, where the central image functions not just as a focus of worship but as a symbol of Thai national identity and the legitimacy of the royal family.

King Asoka sent out missionaries to spread the Buddha’s teaching, and his actions have served as a model for “righteous kings” throughout the Buddhist world.

Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, democratic activist and Nobel laureate, is another striking example of the intersection between religious and political values in the Theravada countries of Southeast Asia. Aung San Suu Kyi was born in 1945, the daughter of Burma's national hero General Aung San. Her father led the Burmese liberation movement during World War II and was assassinated in 1947, just before Burma gained its independence. Aung San Suu Kyi was educated in Rangoon, Delhi, and Oxford and settled down to raise a family in Oxford until she was called back to Burma by her mother's illness in 1988.

In Burma, she became involved in a spontaneous revolt against twenty-six years of repressive military rule. She soon emerged as the movement's leader. Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest, but the movement won a colossal electoral victory in May 1990. The military government annulled the results of the election and imprisoned its leaders. Under house arrest, Aung San Suu Kyi continued to speak in favor of the democratic movement. In 1991, she received the Nobel Peace Prize and was cited by the Nobel committee "for her unflagging efforts...for democracy, human rights, and ethnic conciliation by peaceful means."

Aung San Suu Kyi's political philosophy seems, on the face of it, to be quite simple, but there is force and eloquence in her words, as there was in the teaching of the Buddha. One of her most famous speeches is called simply "Freedom from Fear." The speech begins by saying: "It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it and fear of the scourge of power corrupts those who are subject to it."



Statue of Buddha at the Popchusa Temple in South Korea.

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Near the end of the speech, she refers to Mahatma Gandhi's statement that the greatest gift for an individual or a nation is fearlessness, "not merely bodily courage, but absence of fear from the mind." (This is a reference to a story about the Buddha's gesture of fearlessness when he was threatened by a raging elephant.) Aung San Suu Kyi adds her own Buddhist twist to Gandhi's words by saying, "Fearlessness may be a gift but perhaps more precious is the courage acquired through endeavour, courage that cultivates the habit of refusing to let fear dictate one's actions."

As you listen to these words, you can hear how Aung San Suu Kyi's career brings together modern democratic values and the fundamental Buddhist values of courage, patience, tolerance, and nonviolence. It is powerful mix for anyone who wonders whether Buddhist values belong only in the monastery. Here, they play a forceful and active role in political life. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 7.

Supplementary Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 6.

Questions to Consider

1. Some historians have questioned whether Asoka's *dhamma* really was Buddhism in any recognizable sense of the word. What is Buddhist about his imperial ideology?
2. Why do you think Asoka found the Buddha's teaching attractive as a political ideology?
3. Aung San Suu Kyi's speeches are widely available on the Internet. (You can search for them under her name.) What is Buddhist about her political program?

Mahayana Buddhism and the *Bodhisattva* Ideal

Lecture 10

Mahayana texts promote the ideal of the *bodhisattva*, or “future Buddha,” who does not attempt to achieve *nirvana* as an individual goal but vows to return again and again in the cycle of *samsara* to seek the welfare of others.

The Mahayana, or “Great Vehicle,” emerged as a reform movement in the Indian Buddhist community around the beginning of the common era. Eventually, the Mahayana spread to China, Tibet, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The name “Mahayana” comes from the literature of the movement itself. Mahayana texts refer to themselves as a “Great Vehicle,” in contrast to the Hinayana, or “Lesser Vehicle,” that preceded them. An important source of this contrast is the parable of the burning house in the Lotus *sutra*.

Indian legends trace the origin of the Mahayana to a “Second Turning of the Wheel of the *Dharma*” on the Vulture Peak in Rajagriha during the life of the Buddha. In other words, the Mahayana texts claim to be the teaching of the Buddha himself, delivered to a special assembly of *bodhisattvas* from which other Buddhist practitioners (the disciples and solitary Buddhas) were excluded. Mahayana tradition goes on to say that the Mahayana was concealed for several centuries until the world was ready to receive it, then the *sutras* of the Mahayana were brought forth and promulgated across India.

Scholars are uncertain about the actual origin of the Mahayana. There are suggestions in later Mahayana tradition that practitioners fasted and meditated to receive visions and revelations from great Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. Perhaps some of the early texts of the Mahayana also came in this way, although this could not be true of some of the more elaborate literary *sutras* of the Mahayana. Some scholars have suggested that the Mahayana arose in circles of lay people who were worshipers of particular *stupas*. This view has now been discredited. It seems clear that the Mahayana had a strong monastic component from the very beginning.

The *bodhisattva* ideal is one of the Mahayana tradition's most important innovations. A *bodhisattva* is a "Buddha-to-be" or "future Buddha" who does not attempt to go straight to *nirvana* but returns to this world to help others along the path. The *bodhisattva* ideal includes laymen and laywomen, as well as monks and nuns. The *bodhisattva* cultivates two important virtues: the wisdom (Sanskrit: *prajña*) that leads to *nirvana* and the compassion (*karuna*) that serves the interests of other sentient beings. The *bodhisattva* path can be represented as a two-way street or as a circle leading toward *nirvana*, then returning to the world of *samsara*. The *bodhisattva* ideal is contrasted to the *arhant* ideal, in which a man or woman attempts to achieve *nirvana* for himself or herself by leaving the world of *samsara* behind.

Some people say that a *bodhisattva* renounces *nirvana* in order to lead all other beings to *nirvana*. This is not strictly accurate. A *bodhisattva* aspires to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all other beings. Eventually, even *bodhisattvas* become Buddhas when their aspirations have reached fruition and their practice of the path is complete.

**A *bodhisattva*
aspires to achieve
Buddhahood for
the sake of all
other beings.**

The *bodhisattvas* described in Mahayana literature are often human beings like ourselves—people who are engaged in the world. Vimalakirti was a wise layperson who pretended that he was ill in order to teach a lesson to the Buddha's monastic disciples. A queen named Shrimala taught an important lesson about the Buddha nature. The young student Sudhana visited fifty different teachers and finally found Samantabhadra, a *bodhisattva* who had a vision of the universe that is vastly more complex and complete than anything we find in the earlier literature of this tradition. Such worldly figures had a radical effect on the spread of Buddhism, which was no longer seen as a philosophy based on monasticism but now had direct appeal for lay people.

In classical Mahayana literature, the most important conceptual expression of the *bodhisattva* path is the "mind of awakening," or *bodhicitta*. The "mind of awakening" is a combination of wisdom and compassion. It is expressed in the form of an aspiration: "May I achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all other beings!" It also can be viewed as the nature of one's own mind.

Formal accounts of the *bodhisattva* path are divided into a series of stages. One account of the path divides it into six perfections (*paramita*): generosity, moral conduct, patience, courage, mental concentration, and wisdom. Another account divides the path into ten stages (*bhumi*), but these are not radically different from the path of six perfections. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 4.

Supplementary Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 4.

Questions to Consider

1. Buddhists from the Theravada tradition sometimes say that the Mahayana is just a fabrication and is not the teaching of the Buddha. Mahayana Buddhists say that it is the Buddha's only true teaching. How different do you think the Mahayana is? Are there important continuities that tie the Mahayana together with earlier traditions?
2. Mahayana Buddhists sometimes say that other religious figures are really *bodhisattvas*. Would it be helpful to think of Jesus, for example, as a great *bodhisattva*?

Celestial Buddhas and *Bodhisattvas*

Lecture 11

Devotion to Amitabha has had great influence in China and is now one of the most popular forms of Buddhism in Japan.

Advanced practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path (in the ninth or tenth stages) achieve extraordinary, superhuman powers. These powers make it possible for them to reside in the heavens (hence the name “celestial”) and to function as the Buddhist equivalents of Hindu gods. Buddhists insist, however, that the great *bodhisattvas* have gone far beyond Hindu gods in power and in their understanding of reality. Celestial *bodhisattvas* and Buddhas are the focus of devotion throughout the Mahayana world.

One of the most important celestial *bodhisattvas* in India and elsewhere in the Mahayana world is Avalokiteshvara, the “Lord Who Looks Down.” Avalokiteshvara is the great *bodhisattva* of compassion. In the Lotus *sutra*, Avalokiteshvara is described as a protean deity who takes any form that is appropriate to save the person who calls his name. Devotees of Avalokiteshvara invoke his compassion by chanting the mantra “*om manipadme hum*.” This mantra is sometimes translated, “Ah, the jewel in the lotus,” where *om* is the sacred syllable of the Vedas and *hum* a sound that conveys power. As a mantra, however, the power of this phrase resides in the syllables themselves rather than in their meaning. In India and Tibet, Avalokiteshvara was associated with Tara (“the Protectress”) who is the female manifestation of his compassion. In Tibet, under the name Chenrezig, Avalokiteshvara is thought to be the patron deity of the Tibetan nation, taking form as the monkey who was the progenitor of the Tibetan people and also a succession of Dalai Lamas. In China, Avalokiteshvara was known as Kuan-yin (“one who hears sounds”). During the T’ang dynasty (618–907), Kuan-yin came to be pictured as a



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**Kuan-yin,
China's
version of
Avalokiteshvara.**

white-robed female deity who was particularly associated with the power to grant children.

Maitreya is venerated widely throughout the Buddhist world (including Theravada countries) as the Buddha of the future. Maitreya is thought to be present in a Buddhist heaven known as Tushita (“Pleasurable”). Devotees of Maitreya not only invoke his aid but, in some traditions, make a visual ascent to Maitreya’s heaven to see him face to face. Hsuan-tsang, a well-known Chinese pilgrim who visited India in the seventh century, is said to have visualized Maitreya in heaven when he was captured and nearly sacrificed by pirates on a remote stretch of the Ganges River. A popular and well-known image of Maitreya is Hotei, the fat, laughing Buddha of Chinese tradition.



Statue of Maitreya Buddha.

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Mañjushri (“charming splendor”) is the *bodhisattva* of wisdom and the patron deity of scholars. In his right hand, he carries the sword of wisdom. In his left hand, he carries a copy of the Mahayana *sutra* called the “Perfection of Wisdom.” Mañjushri is the Buddhist counterpart of the popular Hindu goddess Sarasvati, whose festivals are celebrated by schoolchildren across India.

When he was still a *bodhisattva*, the Buddha Amitabha (“Infinite Light”) vowed that, when he became a Buddha, he would create a Pure Land known as Sukhavati (“Pleasurable”). Amitabha’s vow stipulated that anyone who chanted his name with faith, especially at the moment of death, would be reborn in this land. In Sanskrit, the chant is “*Namo ‘Mitabhaya Buddhaya*” (“Homage to Amitabha Buddha”). Like the invocation of Avalokiteshvara’s

name, this practice was a deliberate attempt to open the possibility of salvation to anyone who approached the deity with sincere faith.

Devotion to Amitabha Buddha (often known as Pure Land Buddhism) has been particularly influential in China and Japan. The Pure Land tradition represents the largest Buddhist group in Japan today. It is represented in North America by the Buddhist Churches of America.

Buddhists insist, however, that the great *bodhisattvas* have gone far beyond Hindu gods in power and in their understanding of reality.

The practice of Pure Land Buddhism raises a question about “salvation by faith.” How could a tradition that placed so much emphasis on self-reliance be transformed into a tradition of reliance on a celestial or otherworldly savior? As surprising as it may seem, this tradition is a natural outgrowth of the *bodhisattva*’s compassion. In the Mahayana, it is important to act with compassion and to receive the compassion of others. In the Mahayana, the passage to enlightenment has been stretched out over many lifetimes as a *bodhisattva* returns to earthly life many times to help others. The length of the *bodhisattva* path puts more emphasis on the virtues that help a person get started on the way to awakening. It is less important to have perfect wisdom (that can come later), than to develop the faith that begin the path. It is also important to receive gratefully the compassion of others. These changes of emphasis make possible a view of salvation that is different from anything we have seen before. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 5.

Supplementary Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 5.

Questions to Consider

1. At the end of the last lecture, I asked a question about the continuity between the Mahayana and the Hinayana. That question becomes even sharper when we consider Mahayana worship of celestial Buddhas and *bodhisattvas*. With this new information, how different do you think the Mahayana is from all that came before?
2. Are there still important continuities that tie the Mahayana and Hinayana together?

Emptiness

Lecture 12

Mahayana texts insist that “everything is possible for someone for whom Emptiness is possible.”

The Mahayana introduced many important changes in the Indian Buddhist tradition, but none was as profound or as far-reaching as the concept of Emptiness. Emptiness challenged and undermined many of the rigid categories of traditional Buddhism. But it also introduced a new spirit of affirmation and possibility. A balanced understanding of Emptiness has to account for both its positive and its negative dimensions.

Emptiness can be understood as an extension of the traditional Buddhist doctrine of no self. In the Hindu tradition, particularly in the Upanishads, it was understood that each person has an enduring (eternal) self (*atman*). The Theravada Buddhist tradition denies that there is any enduring self. According to the Theravada, the so-called “self” is made up of a series of momentary phenomena known as *dhammas* (Pali) or *dharma*s (Sanskrit). These momentary phenomena give the illusion of continuity, like the moments of flowing water that make up the current of a river or the flickers of burning gas that make up the flame of a candle.

The Mahayana takes a step further: It denies the reality of any enduring self and also denies the reality of the momentary phenomena that make up the flow of the personality. This Mahayana position is expressed by saying that everything is “empty” (*shunya*) of identity (*svabhava* or *atman*). The nature of all things is simply their “emptiness” (*shunyata*). By rejecting the idea that the personality was made up of real moments, the Mahayana completely reoriented the conceptual framework of Buddhism.

The concept of Emptiness has important negative consequences, but it has a positive dimension as well. If everything is empty of any real identity, there can be no real difference between any two things. As a result, Mahayana texts often equate Emptiness with “non-duality.” If everything is empty, there can be no difference or “duality” between *nirvana* and *samsara*, and there

can be no difference between ourselves and the Buddha. This means that *nirvana* is right here, at this moment, if we can only understand it correctly. It also means that we are already Buddhas, if we understand that the nature of ourselves is no different from the nature of the Buddha.

The *bodhisattva* does not turn away from *nirvana* purely for altruistic reasons. In seeking *nirvana*, the *bodhisattva* finds that there is no *nirvana* apart from *samsara*. This means that *nirvana* can be attained only in the context of *samsara*. A correct understanding of Emptiness requires a balance between two different perspectives or “truths.” Ultimately, all things are empty and nothing is real. Conventionally, from the point of view of ordinary life, it is possible to take things seriously.

A balanced understanding of Emptiness has to account for both its positive and its negative dimensions.

The relationship between the two truths is not static. It involves a three-stage cognitive movement from the conventional to the

ultimate, then back to the conventional. The *bodhisattva* begins by affirming the distinctions between things, thinking, “I am in *samsara* and would like to achieve *nirvana*.” When the *bodhisattva* studies Emptiness, he or she realizes that there is no difference between *nirvana* and *samsara*. Then the *bodhisattva* realizes that there is no difference between the second stage and the first. The denial of the denial of distinctions is the same as their reaffirmation.

The third stage in this process is paradoxical and elusive, but it often can be conveyed in simple ways, with a gesture, perhaps, or a smile. It appears in the famous aphorism about the Zen tea ceremony: For an ordinary person, a bowl is a bowl and tea is tea. When you are studying Zen, a bowl is no longer a bowl and tea is no longer tea. When you are awakened, a bowl is a bowl and tea is tea. It also appeared in a lecture by the Dalai Lama about the nature of the self. After giving several reasons why the self did not exist, he smiled and asked, “If there is no self, who just told you this?” He answered his own question by saying, “Just the self” or “Just me!”

The philosopher Nagarjuna expressed the spirit of this third cognitive stage when he said: “Everything is possible for one for whom Emptiness is possible.” His opponent argued that if everything is an illusion, no one can accomplish anything at all. Nagarjuna said that, if everything is an illusion, there is no barrier to accomplishing anything. With Emptiness, everything is possible. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 4, section 2.

Supplementary Reading

Eckel, *To See the Buddha*..

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 4, section 2.

Questions to Consider

1. The doctrine of Emptiness sharpens many of our earlier questions about the element of negation in Buddhist tradition. If everything were “empty of individual identity,” would this make you feel wiser or freer?
2. How might the doctrine of Emptiness change your approach to the conventional details of life, including the path that leads eventually to *nirvana*?

Buddhist Philosophy

Lecture 13

For all its complexity, Buddhist philosophy is meant to be a tool to help a person see reality clearly and be free from the illusions that cause suffering and drive the cycle of death and rebirth.

Few religious traditions argue that everything is possible precisely because everything is unreal. This way of speaking is meant to give pause and meant to make people think in new ways about ordinary experiences. This lecture will take the study of Emptiness a step further by looking at two major Indian Buddhist schools that tried, in different ways, to pin down the meaning of Emptiness. The study of Buddhist philosophy is not meant to be easy. The concept of Emptiness already presents formidable difficulties, and these difficulties are only compounded by the technical style of argument favored by the philosophers of classical India. Buddhist philosophical texts were produced in a sophisticated monastic environment, and they often relied on technical discourse that now seems almost impenetrable in even the best translations. But it is worth spending a lecture grappling with the work of the philosophers, as it is to grapple with the work of sophisticated Jewish or Christian philosophers. A sophisticated intellectual account of any religious tradition helps clarify the basic problems. More important, it helps us determine where the most significant intellectual problems really lie, not just for ourselves as outside observers, but for the practitioners of the tradition themselves.

What is Buddhist “philosophy”? The most common word for “philosophy” in the Indian tradition is simply “vision” (*darshana*). The same word is used to name the emotionally charged vision of an image in Buddhist worship. The word is related etymologically to a form of meditation known as *vipashyana* (discriminating vision, or insight). In the lecture on the path to *nirvana*, we saw that the path could be divided into three categories: *sila* (moral conduct), *samadhi* (mental concentration), and *pañña* (wisdom). Philosophy, like “insight meditation,” is one of the ways to cultivate wisdom.

This means that “philosophy” is not just a theoretical activity; it is a form of Buddhist practice. You might say that Buddhist philosophy is “practice seeking clarification” in the same way that Christian theology is “faith seeking understanding.” But the “clarification” of the mind is not just an intellectual game. “Philosophy” helps a person see through the appearances of things and confront reality face to face. The goal is to experience the freedom of the Buddha’s awakening. On these points all Buddhist philosophers agreed, but they did not always agree about their approaches to the concept of Emptiness. Out of the differences in their approaches developed two major schools of Mahayana philosophy.

The first major school of Mahayana philosophy is known as the Madhyamaka, or “Middle Way,” School. The Madhyamaka School emerged in India in the second or third century C.E. through the works of the philosopher Nagarjuna. It was developed for almost a thousand years in India, was transmitted to Tibet, and became the dominant tradition in Tibetan philosophy. Nagarjuna adhered closely to the understanding of Emptiness outlined in the last lecture. Nagarjuna said, “When Buddhas teach the *Dharma*, they make use of two truths: ordinary relative truth and ultimate truth. Anyone who does not know the distinction between these two truths does not know the profound point of the Buddhas’ teaching.” From the point of view of ultimate truth, all things are empty of identity, but from the relative (or conventional) point of view, the categories of ordinary life have to be accepted as valid. Nagarjuna distilled this point into a simple formula: “It is impossible to teach ultimate truth without relying on conventional [truth]. Without understanding the ultimate, it is impossible to attain nirvana.”

The key point of controversy for Nagarjuna’s commentators had to do with the meaning of the word “rely.” One group of followers, known as the Svatantrikas, thought that they had to accept that things were *established or proven* in a conventional sense before they could argue against them in an ultimate sense. This position came from their conviction that philosophers had to start from established premises before they could refute the positions of their opponents. Another group of followers, known as the Prasangikas, thought that they only needed to “presuppose” the positions of their opponents before showing that they led to absurd conclusions. The Prasangika interpretation of Nagarjuna is the dominant position in Tibet.

What is at stake in this dispute? We can think of it as way to focus, with fine philosophical precision, on the meaning of the words that ended the Dalai Lama's explanation of the self. In the last lecture, I said that the Dalai Lama ended by referring to himself as the "mere self" or "just me" (*bdag tsam*). What does it mean to say "just me"? The Prasangikas say that this simple phrase refers to the self in a way that attributes no substantial identity to it. It is a phrase that "satisfies only when it is not analyzed." In other words, it is a phrase that works only when you don't ask whether there is any real thing behind the words.

If you have been listening carefully to my comments about the Buddhist concept of no self, you will understand that this phrase expresses the key point in the Buddhist view of the world. Buddhists want to find a way to live in this world, respond to it emotionally, and take it seriously intellectually, but not be bound by any of it. This requires a delicate balance between the two intellectual poles of the Middle Path: not too much self and not too little

self, but just enough to be effective and at the same time to be free. This is why the Madhyamaka School is called the school of the Middle Path.

We can doubt the reality of all the images we create with the mind, but how we can doubt the reality of the mind itself?

The second major school is known as the Yogachara, or "Yoga Practice," School. The Yogachara School was founded in the fourth century by Asanga, with help from his brother Vasubandhu. Like the

Madhyamaka, the Yogachara School had a long and active history in India. At the beginning of the seventh century, it was carried to China by the Chinese pilgrim Hsuan-tsang, where it had significant impact on the tone and orientation of Chinese Buddhist thought. Instead of using a doctrine of two truths to understand Emptiness, the Yogachara developed a concept of three natures. Yogachara philosophers thought of the ordinary experience of reality as "dependent nature": it depends for its existence on a series of momentary causes and conditions. In some respects, ordinary experience is real; in some respects, it is unreal. The unreal aspect of dependent nature is called "imagined nature." This consists of the concepts and distinctions that

we impose on the flow of experience. The real aspect of dependent nature goes by the name “perfected nature.” This is the mind itself, devoid of all imaginary distinctions. Another name for perfected nature is Emptiness.

Yogachara philosophers expressed this concept in a series of verses that were meant to be memorized and quoted in debate. To our ears, they sound clumsy and obscure, but they are quite precise and rhythmic in Sanskrit. In English, one of the most important verses sounds like this: “The imagination of something that is unreal is real. But the duality in it is not real. The Emptiness in it is real, however, and it is real in Emptiness.” In Sanskrit this verse reads: “*Abhutaparikalpo ‘sti dyayan tatra na vidyate/shunyata vidyate tv atra tasyam api sa vidyate.*”

It is possible to get a sense of this formula without having to sign up for a course in Sanskrit. Fortunately, the Yogachara philosophers gave us a series of examples to help understand what they mean. Sometimes, dependent nature is compared to a dream. All the phantoms in the dream are unreal, but no one would doubt the reality of the mind that does the dreaming. The phantoms of the dream are imagined nature. The dreaming mind is dependent nature. Dependent nature also can be compared to a stormy ocean. Imagined nature is like the separate waves on the ocean, and perfected nature is like the deep stillness of the ocean itself. Meditation is meant to still the waves so that the pure, undifferentiated nature of the mind can become clear. The pure nature of the mind is often compared to a jewel hidden in a dung heap. Meditation is meant to help find the jewel and clean away the defilements.

When I teach about the Yogachara, I am struck by two things: The first is that it seems to turn the basic Mahayana understanding of Emptiness upside down. The Madhyamaka insisted that ultimately nothing is real, including Emptiness itself. The Yogachara says that the mind is real; it is only the imaginary construction of the mind that is unreal. The second surprising thing about this position is that it seems to make so much intuitive sense. We can doubt the reality of all the images we create with the mind, but how we can doubt the reality of the mind itself?

Why did the Yogachara take a position that seems so radically opposed to the position of the Madhyamaka? Deep motivations are hard to discern, but the Yogachara philosophers tell us there were two reasons: (1) To take the goal of the Buddhist path seriously, a person has to be convinced that it is real. In this case, the goal is the complete purification of the mind. (2) To be able to reach the goal, however, a person has to be convinced that all the barriers that stand between them and the goal can actually be overcome. To say, “duality is unreal” means that the illusions that tie people to the world of *samsara* are nothing but a dream. Buddhahood is the perfect awakening from that dream.

This conviction about the reality of the mind seemed to make the Yogachara attractive to the Chinese. The Yogachara School does not exist as a separate entity today, except for a few isolated monasteries in Japan, but its ideas had deep influence on Chinese Buddhist philosophy, especially on the concept of the Buddha nature in Zen. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 4, section 3.

Supplementary Reading

Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis*, chapters 11–12.

Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*.

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 4, section 3.

Questions to Consider

1. The Tibetans preferred the most austere, negative viewpoint of the Madhyamaka. The Chinese preferred the more positive viewpoint of the Yogachara. Which do you prefer and why?
2. Is it surprising that one tradition of Buddhist philosophy thinks that ultimate reality “exists” and another thinks that it does not? Does this extraordinary difference of opinion tell us anything important about the Buddhist tradition?

Buddhist Tantra

Lecture 14

Buddhist Tantra was based on a radical extension of the doctrine of Emptiness. The Tantric tradition argued that if everything is empty, there is no practical difference between the serenity of the Buddha and destructive feelings, such as anger or passion, and there is no difference between the sexes.

The last lecture took a journey into what we might call the high monastic culture of Buddhist India. This was a world of fine intellectual distinctions and sophisticated debate, as you would expect from the monasteries that for seven or eight hundred years were the bearers of Buddhist culture in India. In their day, these monasteries were as complex and influential as modern universities are for us today. But there was more going on in Indian Buddhism than just the elevated intellectual activity of the monasteries. On the fringes of Indian civilization, in the unsettled areas at the edge of the forest and in the impure and frightening space of the cremation ground, another vision of Buddhist practice began slowly to emerge. This vision eventually came to be known as Tantra. Tantra brought about another profound change in Buddhist values. Our job in this lecture is to understand the shape of Tantric Buddhism.

Tantric Buddhism began to emerge in India during the sixth century of the common era. Tantra is found not only in Buddhism but also in Hinduism and in other Indian religious traditions. Tantric Buddhism shares many important concepts, symbols, and ritual practices with its Tantric counterparts in other Indian traditions. As was true with earlier movements, such as the Mahayana, Tantric Buddhism produced a striking transformation in Buddhist values. How is the Tantric tradition related to earlier forms of Buddhism? Sometimes people describe the Tantric tradition as a separate “vehicle” (alongside the Hinayana and the Mahayana).

But it is more helpful and more accurate to consider Tantra an extension of the values of the Mahayana. The best way to begin the study of Tantra is to look at some of the ways people refer to the Tantric tradition. These names help identify important aspects of Tantra and differentiate it from the earlier tradition. The word “Tantra” itself refers to the “warp” that was used to weave a piece of fabric. Tantra can be understood as the thread on which reality is woven. Somewhat less poetically, the word *tantra*, like the word *sutra*, can be understood as referring to a body of texts. (In India, threads are used to bind the leaves of a text together.) The word *tantra* can also refer to a lineage of transmission and to power. Tantric tradition is particularly concerned with the transmission of insight from teacher to student and with the ritual acquisition of power. Tantra can be called the Vajrayana (“the vehicle of the diamond or thunderbolt”), because it is meant to produce an experience of awakening that is as hard as a diamond and as sharp as a thunderbolt.

Tantra also is called the Mantrayana (“the vehicle of the *mantras* or sacred chants”). The word *mantra* refers to a series of syllables that bring about an effect simply by the utterance of the syllables themselves. Early Vedic hymns were called *mantras* because they were believed to have the power to invoke the gods. The Tantric tradition makes extensive use of *mantras* as magic charms and as tools of meditation. A mundane example of the Tantric use of *mantras* is the rain-making ritual in the Hevajra Tantra.

What is the fundamental teaching of Tantra? Buddhist Tantra was based on a radical extension of the doctrine of Emptiness, understood as an assertion of non-duality. The Buddha was pictured not just as a serene and peaceful figure, but as a figure full of passion and wrath. These images are known as “wrathful Buddhas.” Tantric texts say that poisonous emotions, such as passion and wrath, can be removed by cultivating and transmuting the emotions itself.

Those who do not perceive the truth think in terms of Samsara and nirvana, but those who perceive the truth think neither of Samsara nor Nirvana. Discriminating thought is then the great demon that produces the ocean of Samsara. But being free of this discriminating thought, the great ones are freed from the bonds of existence...Just as water that has entered the ear may be removed by water and just

as a thorn may be removed by a thorn, so those who know remove passion by passion itself. Just as a washerman removes the grime from a garment by means of grime, so the wise man renders himself free of impurity by means of impurity itself.

—*Cittavisuddhiprakarana* (trans. David Snellgrove, in Edward Conze, ed., *Buddhist Texts through the Ages*, New York: Harper & Row, 1964, p. 221)

This understanding of non-duality is represented by the image of a woman using a thorn to remove a thorn on the wall of the Hindu temple at Khajuraho.

Tantric Buddhas also can be pictured as the union of male and female. These figures are known as *yab-yum* images. The term *yab-yum* comes from a Tibetan word that means “male and female” or “father and mother.” People often ask whether these images were meant to be taken literally and to suggest that sexual union is a form of Buddhahood. This question is difficult to answer, because the texts are not always easy to interpret. In some situations, a ritual of sexual union clearly played a role in Tantric meditation. But it is more common for these images to function as symbolic representations of a mind that has transcended all dualities, including the distinction between the sexes.

The union of opposites was elaborated as a series of ritual and symbolic pairs.

Male	Female	Union
Compassion	Wisdom	<i>Bodhicitta</i>
<i>Vajra</i>	Bell	
Semen	Blood	Seed
Consonants	Vowels	Syllable
Moon	Sun	Fire
Subject	Object	Mind
Left vein	Right vein	Central vein

These pairs were used not just in Tantric ritual and art but also in the practice of Tantric meditation.

Finally, was there anything that distinguished the practitioners of Tantra from the ordinary practitioners of the *bodhisattva* path? The earliest bands of Tantric practitioners were known as *siddhas*, or “perfected ones.” We can call them simply “saints.” As you might expect, the stories of the *siddhas* depict them as people who have rejected the conventions of Indian society in a radical way. They often are described as living in cremation grounds or in some other impure and dangerous place, and they participate in rituals that overthrow the norms of conventional behavior. You can get a taste of their practice from the story of Maitrigupta (also known as Maitripa).

**Tantric Buddhism
produced a striking
transformation in
Buddhist values.**

The story of Maitrigupta shows one final aspect of Tantra that is often present in Tantric tradition. When insight comes by overturning conventional distinctions, and when teaching is dangerous and often secret, it is important to have a teacher to introduce you to the practice. Without a trustworthy teacher who has been through the process before, you can be a danger to yourself and others. A Tantric teacher is called a *guru* in Sanskrit or a *lama* in Tibetan. For a Tantric practitioner, the *guru* belongs not at the end of an introduction to the Tantra, but at the beginning, because it is impossible to even begin the practice without the encouragement and initiation of a teacher. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 6.

Supplementary Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 5, section 5.

White, *Tantra in Practice*, Introduction and chapters 1, 14, 30.

Questions to Consider

1. When Western scholars first encountered Tantric Buddhism, they thought of it as a corruption of the Buddha's teaching and they blamed it for the eventual destruction of Buddhism in India. Do you think Tantra distorts the Buddha's teaching?
2. Could you argue that Tantra is not a corruption of the Buddha's teaching but a rediscovery and intensification of the basic insight in the Buddha's teaching?

The Theory and Practice of the *Mandala*

Lecture 15

***Mandalas* were used to explore symbolic and ritual connections between the self, important Buddhist deities, and the universe as a whole.**

In the last lecture, we saw that the goal of Tantric practice was to achieve a union of opposites. This union was expressed by a series of symbolic pairs. These pairs applied to the personality, to ritual action, and to the cosmos as a whole. In this lecture, we will discuss a system of Tantric symbolism that is based not on the number two but on the number five. As before, the goal will be to overcome duality by integrating the complexity of human experience into a single, unified whole.

This system of symbolism is expressed by the visual form of a *mandala*. The word *mandala* means “circle.” In its most basic form, a *mandala* consists of five major points: north, south, east, west, and the center. A separate Buddha is located at each of these five points. These are known as “meditation” (*dhyani*) Buddhas. The identity of these Buddhas is not fixed. Different Buddhas are associated with different *mandalas*. But a Buddha who often occupies the center of the *mandala* is Akshobhya, the unshakable Buddha who symbolizes consciousness and the element of space. The most elementary practice connected with the *mandala* is to circle around its, then proceed to the center. In this way, a person draws a circle around the ritual world, then unifies it by moving into the place at the center.

The journey into the next life follows the form of a *mandala*. When a person dies, the person’s consciousness dissolves into the Buddha at the center of the *mandala*.

The five Buddhas of the *mandala* are connected symbolically with other lists of five: five “aggregates” or constituents of the personality, five forms of consciousness, five fundamental evils, five colors, the five directions of the cosmos, five female Buddhas, or Yoginis, five *bodhisattvas*, five watches of

the day, five seasons of the year, five different *mantras*, and five components of the alphabet.

It is possible to get a picture of these symbolic connections in a text that describes the figure of Akshobhya Buddha at the center of the *mandala*. (It may seem strange to use words to build a visual picture of a deity, but that is exactly what's intended. Tantra is a strongly visual tradition: the *mandala* maps reality in a visual way. But it often conveys this vision through oral transmission.)

[First you lay out the space for the *mandala* in front of you and make offerings of incense and so on, then you can visualize Akshobhya in the following way:]

There in the center [of the *mandala*] one envisages the syllable PAM of many colours. This turns into a fair eight-petalled lotus of many colours with the red syllable RAM at its center. This becomes a solar disc, upon which is a dark-blue HUM whence arises Akshobhya with one face and two arms, in the crossed-legged posture and making the earth-touching gesture. His body exhibits the 32 major and the 80 minor marks of perfection, for it is the repository of the whole host of excellent qualities, the ten powers, fearlessness, and the rest. It is without apertures, flesh or bone, for it is neither true nor false like pure light reflected in a mirror. He is black in color because he is permeated with great compassion, and his symbol is a black *vajra* [thunderbolt] which embodies the five constituents of the pure absolute.

—*Advayavajrasamgraha* (trans. David Snellgrove, in Edward Conze, ed., *Buddhist Texts through the Ages*, p. 249)

The text goes on to say that Akshobhya is associated with consciousness, anger, the middle of the day, knowledge, space, sound, and the CA series of consonants. When these symbolic associations are assembled together, not just for Akshobhya but for all the Buddhas, the *mandala* provides a symbolic map of all reality. In other words, the *mandala* serves as a mesocosm that unites the microcosm of the personality with the macrocosm of the external



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A monk making Kalachakra sand *mandala*.

world. This union of microcosm and macrocosm is similar to the union discussed in the Upanishads (see Lecture Two), but it is more complex and detailed than anything we saw in the Upanishads. For one thing, it represents a precise view of the world. At the center is a mountain that also functions as a palace for the gods. This mountain is called Mount Meru. Around the mountain are four continents. In traditional Buddhist cosmology, our home is the southern continent, known as Jambudvīpa, or “the Rose-Apple Island.” This cosmology corresponds roughly to the geography of India, with the Himalayas to the north and a triangular continent to the south, but the cosmology is also translatable to other settings. On the island of Bali in Indonesia, where Hindu and Buddhist Tantra still have a great deal of influence, a central volcano is associated symbolically with Mount Meru. Balinese ritual is focused on the holy water that flows out of this central volcano. The mandalic view of the cosmos also involves a precise view of the human personality. The body itself is made up of six energy centers or *chakras* that run up the spine. The first five correspond to the five Buddhas of the *mandala*, and the sixth corresponds to the transcendent reality that lies beyond.

Mandalas are used in many different aspects of Tantric practice. *Mandalas* often function as tools for worship. When groups of Tibetan monks are asked to display some aspect of their tradition to American audiences, they often create two-dimensional *mandalas* using colored sand. These sand *mandalas* are blessed and function as temporary palaces for the deities of the *mandala*. When the worship is over, the *mandalas* are swept up and destroyed as a lesson in impermanence. *Mandalas* used for worship can also be constructed in three dimensions, ranging in size from small votive objects to massive temples, such as the Gyantse Kumbum in Tibet.

Mandalas also are a powerful tool for meditation. In some rituals, Tantric practitioners visualize the deities in the *mandala*. These visualizations are often elaborately detailed and follow the form of the Tantric deities represented in Tantric texts or art. When we imagined that a golden Buddha was sitting in front of us, then imagined that we were bringing all the flowers in the universe to make offerings to it, we did a preliminary exercise in Tantric meditation. Tantric practitioners take a further step: After they have visualized the deity, they unite with it as a way of experiencing the non-duality that unites the Buddha and themselves.

According to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the journey into the next life follows the form of a *mandala*. When a person dies, the person's consciousness dissolves into the Buddha at the center of the *mandala*. Unless the person recognizes this Buddha as manifestation of his or her own mind, the consciousness slips away from the center of the *mandala* and



The Gyantse Kumbum in Tibet is a striking three-dimensional *mandala*.

Corel Stock Photo Library.

circles around the periphery, experiencing a different Buddha each day. At first, these Buddhas are peaceful, but eventually, they manifest their wrathful aspect. If the person still fails to recognize these Buddhas as aspects of his or her own mind, there is nothing left but to fall back into rebirth in this world.

A sacred landscape can be mapped as a *mandala*. To Tibetans, the land of Tibet has the form of a *mandala*. Tibetan pilgrims follow a route that leads around the country on the perimeter of the *mandala*, then to the center of the *mandala* in the capital city of Lhasa. When they arrive in Lhasa, they circle the city on the circumambulation route, then they proceed to the Jokhang, the temple that stands at the center of the city. ■

Essential Reading

Brauen, *Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism*.

Supplementary Reading

Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*.

ten Grotenhuis, *Japanese Mandalas: Representation of Sacred Geography*.

Questions to Consider

1. One of the most important features of religions is to create a meaningful map of the cosmos. They map the world and show how human beings can situate themselves within it. How is the cosmos mapped in religious traditions that are familiar to you?
2. How do these maps of the cosmos affect people's behavior? Are you aware of religious people who go on pilgrimages, for example, to visit and contemplate the significance of places that are particularly sacred in their traditions? How do these places help situate people within the cosmos as a whole?

The “First Diffusion of the *Dharma*” in Tibet

Lecture 16

The “First Diffusion of the *Dharma*” into Tibet began when the Tibetan king Songtsen Gampo built a temple in Lhasa to house an image of the Buddha.

The Tantric tradition began as a countercultural movement on the fringes of Buddhist society. Before many centuries had passed, however, Tantra became an integral part of life in the Indian monasteries. In the latter half of the first millennium C.E. (from about 600 to 1200 C.E.), Tantric practices and teachings became part of the sophisticated and complex tradition of monastic learning. These monasteries had large libraries, colorful rituals, and an elaborate monastic curriculum, ranging all the way from Buddhist philosophy and meditation to astronomy and medicine. Unfortunately, their cultural strength turned out to be a major weakness. When waves of Afghan raiders began to sweep across the Ganges Basin, the monasteries were tempting targets for plunder and destruction. By the year 1200, after two centuries of destruction, little was left of Buddhist monastic culture but a handful of destitute, old monks. Our study of the Mahayana now shifts beyond the Himalayas to Tibet, where Indian monastic culture has been preserved more faithfully and more richly than anywhere else in the Buddhist world.

The “First Diffusion of the *Dharma*” in Tibet began in the seventh century. During the seventh century, a line of kings from the Yarlung Valley in central Tibet united the Tibetan tribes and began to extend their military influence outside the Tibetan plateau. On the east, they encountered the sophisticated Buddhist culture of T’ang China. To the south lay the Buddhist culture of India. Until the early part of the twentieth century, the history of the early Tibetan kings was accessible only in Tibetan sources that were written many centuries later. But the Buddhist sites on the Silk Road in Chinese Central Asia have turned out to be rich sources for the study of early Tibetan history. It is possible now to speak with much more confidence about the formation of Buddhism in Tibet.

According to Tibetan tradition, King Songtsen Gampo (c. 609–649) invited one of his two Buddhist wives to help him introduce the cult of the Buddha to Tibet. The initial attempts to build a temple in the capital Lhasa were unsuccessful. In a dream, the king was told that the land of Tibet lay on the body of a demoness who had to be subdued before the cult of the Buddha could be successfully established. He ordered a series of temples to be built around the country, pinning down her knees and elbows and her hips and shoulders. Finally, a temple was built in Lhasa to pin down her heart. This temple is the Jokhang, the most sacred temple in Tibet and the site of the Jobo Rinpoche, Songtsen Gampo's first Buddha image. The actions of Songtsen Gampo not only subdued the demoness that was Tibet, but they marked Tibet with the form of a *mandala*.

In passing, we should note that there is great inconsistency in the spelling of Tibetan words. Tibetan spelling was fixed over a thousand years ago, and modern pronunciation differs widely from traditional spelling. In the outlines that go with these lectures, I will use a phonetic system to indicate how these words are pronounced. Correct traditional spellings can be found in the glossary.

The next major series of events occurred in the eighth century, during the reign of another Buddhist king, Thrisong Detsen. Thrisong Detsen sponsored the construction of a monastery at Samye, the first Buddhist monastery in Tibet. The construction of the monastery required the help of the Tantric saint Padmasambhava, also known as Guru Rinpoche ("Precious Teacher"). With his magic power, Padmasambhava subdued the demons that opposed the monastery's construction. Padmasambhava became a focus of storytelling and outright myth making in later Tibetan history. It would be wrong to pass him by without giving an impression of the way he was perceived in later centuries.

David Snellgrove and Hugh Richardson have translated a passage from the legendary biography of Padmasambhava that gives an idea of how large he became in the Tibetan imagination. The passage starts with a miracle. After spending some time in Lhasa, Padmasambhava travels to meet King Thrisong Detsen. The king and his retinue were in a barren valley and could find no water for their lunchtime tea. Padmasambhava struck the rock with

his staff and told the soldiers to hold out their buckets and collect the water. At this point, Padmasambhava had not yet met the king, and he began to wonder how he should best greet him:

"I am not born from a womb, but was magically born," he said. "The king was born from a womb, so I am greater by birth. I am a Religious King, who ruled in the land of U-rgyan, and my lineage is greater than the king of this evil land of Tibet. As for our two aspects, he's in a confused state of ignorance, while I'm skilled in all the five branches of learning. My buddhahood was acquired in only one lifetime...This king must certainly salute me first. But I wonder, shall I return his salutation or not?"

Padmasambhava decided that his dignity requires him not to salute the king. The king, of course, decides that he should wait for Padmasambhava to salute him first. As they stand face to face, each one waiting for the other to make the first move, Padmasambhava begins to express himself in a series of verses:

The Buddhas of past, present and future emerge from wombs,
Accumulating stocks [of merit and knowledge] throughout three
long, incalculable world-ages.
But I am the Buddha who is Lotus-Born [Padmasambhava],
Possessing the precepts of the insight that comes from above.
I discourse fully on all the Buddhist Ways [*yana*] without
confusion.
I am the Law which is Lotus-Born...
Outwardly I wear the saffron robes of a monk.
Inwardly I am the highest of tantric yogins.

—Snellgrove and Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*
(Boulder, CO: Prajna Press, 1980, pp. 97–98)

After a few more verses in this vein, the king bowed down and asked his forgiveness. Padmasambhava then told him to atone for his sin by constructing five new *stupas*, and Padmasambhava concealed a treasure in



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Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Tibet.

each one of them. King Thrisong Detsen also needed the help of the Indian scholar Shantarakshita to establish the monastic curriculum in his new monastery. Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita represent the two faces of Tibetan Buddhism: a reverence for the power of a Tantric practitioner and a reverence for the practice of Buddhist scholasticism.

Tibetan tradition also tells us that Thrisong Detsen sponsored a debate at Samye to determine the character of Tibetan Buddhism. Representing the Chinese side was a meditation master named Mahayana, who advocated a practice of sudden awakening. Representing the Indian side was a disciple of Shantarakshita named Kamalashila, who advocated a practice of gradual awakening. According to Tibetan tradition, the king decided in favor of the Indian party and permanently oriented the Tibetan tradition toward India. The “First Diffusion” of Buddhism came to an end around the year 836, when a king named Langdarma attempted to suppress Buddhism. He was assassinated, and the line of Tibetan kings was broken.

The Buddhist tradition in Tibet has had an uneasy relationship with an indigenous tradition by the name of Bon. The Bon tradition is sometimes called the indigenous shamanism of Tibet. Its practices often involve a conscious inversion of Buddhist practices. From a Buddhist point of view, Bon seems challenging and dangerous. From the point of view of its own practitioners, Bon represents the practice of Tibetan religion as it existed in Tibet before the coming of Buddhism. The Bon tradition traces its origin to a figure named Shen-rab who is called a “Buddha” (Tibetan: *sang-gye*), like Shakyamuni, but comes from the region of Tazig (sTag-gzigs) to the west of Tibet, rather than from India to the south. Tazig is associated in a loose way with Persia. Like Buddhism, the Bon tradition developed an elaborate canon of scripture. Many of the teachings in this canon are very close to the teachings found in Tibetan Buddhist texts. One Bon text, for example, describes reality in a way that is very similar to the Mahayana concept of Emptiness:

The elements of existence are like a dream or mirage.
 Their sole validity is their essential vacuity.
 This truth which never came about
 Was never said to have been really taught,
 It is taught in the form of metaphor.
 Transcending sounds and terms or words,
 It cannot be taught for what it really is.

—Snellgrove and Richardson,
 A Cultural History of Tibet, p. 106

But Bon texts also make eloquent attacks on the role of Buddhism in Tibet:

King Trhi-song-de-tsen is a roguish fellow.
 His ministers are monstrous rogues.
 Our blazing light is now withdrawn.
 Now is the time of these Buddhist monks.
 The princes now have faith in gold
 And our haloed Bon declines.
 May the king be a village beggar
 And his ministers be shepherds!

May the land of Tibet break into pieces
And these Buddhist monks lose their law.
May these nuns bear children
And these Buddhist priests lead fighting gangs!
May their monasteries be filled with battle
And their temples set on fire!
O may my curse be effective
And may these books of mine be found by someone worthy!”

—Snellgrove and Richardson,
A Cultural History of Tibet, p. 107

In spite of these vivid and ancient curses, Bon has so thoroughly accommodated itself to Buddhist beliefs and practices that scholars are inclined to think of it as just another part of the complex phenomenon of Buddhism in Tibet. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 11.

Supplementary Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 7.

Questions to Consider

1. Tibet shows again how important royal patronage has been to the establishment of Buddhism in new regions. Does the Tibetan case tell us anything more about the Buddhist alliance between monks and kings?
2. Both Padmasambhava, the Tantric saint, and Shantarakshita, the Indian scholar and philosopher, played important roles in the formation of Tibetan Buddhism. Why did Tibetans need both of them to get the tradition established? Are both essential for the formation of a complete Buddhist culture?

The Schools of Tibetan Buddhism

Lecture 17

Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, the Tibetan tradition crystallized into four major schools.

The “Later Diffusion of the *Dharma*” in Tibet took place during the eleventh century. Important teachers, such as Atisha (982–1054), reintroduced the tradition of monastic learning from eastern India. Tibetan Buddhists, such as the Tantric saint Marpa, traveled to India to collect teachings and texts. From these tentative beginnings, and similar activities, grew most of the schools that have dominated Tibetan Buddhism to the present day. Our job in this lecture is to become familiar with the four major schools—to understand how they got started and how they have contributed to the shape of Tibetan Buddhism as we know it today.

Of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, only one traces its origin back to the first diffusion of the *Dharma* in the eighth century C.E. This is the Nyingma, or “Old,” School. The Nyingma School thinks of itself as the heir of Padmasambhava, the Tantric saint who helped Thrisong Detsen subdue the demons and build the first Tibetan monastery at Samye. Because of the gap in Tibetan tradition between the reign of Langdarma (in the ninth century) and the reintroduction of Buddhism in the eleventh century, the connection between Padmasambhava and the later Nyingma tradition is problematic. To establish continuity with Padmasambhava, members of this school claim to have discovered texts that Padmasambhava hid in the landscape of Tibet or in the minds of his disciples.

The techniques for discovering and deciphering these texts (known as *termas*, or “treasures”) give an extraordinary glimpse into the way authority and charisma are negotiated in a Tantric context. A good example of this practice is the Nyingma saint Jigme Lingpa, who claimed to be a reincarnation of Thrisong Detsen. Like many Nyingma *lamas*, and like many Indian Tantric saints, Jigme Lingpa spent many years in meditation and had the experience of being visited by many of the important figures in the history of his tradition, including Padmasambhava and Thrisong Detsen. They told him that he was

an important vehicle for the transmission of Padmasambhava's teaching. Eventually, he had a dream of being transported to the great Svayambhunath Stupa in Kathmandu and receiving a secret text. At first, the text came to him in a coded language that was impossible to read, but eventually, the same heavenly messengers that delivered the text gave him the key to break the code. He then deciphered the text and began to teach it to his disciples.

The story of Jigme Lingpa tells us a great deal about the Nyingma tradition and about Tibetan Buddhism itself. First of all, it is a tradition that is founded on meditative experience. In this sense, it probably is the Tibetan tradition that comes closest to the pure transmission of the Tantric impulse from India. Jigme Lingpa did not study in any sophisticated monastery. He did not study philosophy and he was not a scholar. His charisma—his power—was established by the vividness and the plausibility of personal vision. The Nyingma tradition still maintains this character today. It appeals to people precisely because it puts its feet down on direct, personal experience. But it also conveys the ancient Buddhist respect for scriptural transmission.

Jigme Lingpa's authority may have been founded on personal experience, but it was expressed in the translation and dissemination of a text. Even in its most esoteric and personal form, Tibetan Buddhism is devoted to texts—and not just to old texts that come from the time of the Buddha, but to texts generated by authoritative figures who manifest themselves from time to time in the history of the tradition. Tibetan Buddhists have a "canon" of scripture, settled in the thirteenth century, that draws a line around the textual transmission that came from India. But in a broader sense, the "canon" is still open, as new texts are generated or "discovered" to respond to the special needs of a new community or new generation.

Beginning in the thirteenth century, it was no longer possible for the Tibetans to travel to India. ... You could say that it was the century when Tibetan Buddhism had to come of age and develop its own distinctive traditions.

The Kagyu, or “Teaching Lineage,” School traces its origin to the Lama Marpa (1012–1096). Marpa traveled to India to study with Indian teachers and brought their teachings and texts to serve as the foundation of a new Tantric lineage. As I mentioned at the end of my lecture on Buddhist Tantra, the word *lama* is the Tibetan equivalent of the Sanskrit word *guru*, which means a religious teacher. The *guru* or the *lama* is particularly important in Tantra, because of the secrecy and danger of Tantric teaching. *Lamas* are so important in Tibet that Tibetan Buddhism is sometimes referred to as *Lamaism*.

Marpa’s most important disciple was Milarepa (1040–1123), one of Tibet’s most beloved saints. The biography of Milarepa depicts him as a weak-willed young man who was persuaded to support his mother’s plot of revenge against relatives who had stolen her property. Milarepa successfully destroyed the relatives with magic formulas he learned from a black magician. He became aware of the burden of his bad *karma* and sought a *lama* to help him achieve awakening and escape the cycle of rebirth. His search brought him to Marpa. Marpa put him through an intense series of trials, reducing him to almost complete despair, before he finally agreed to give Milarepa the Tantric initiation he was seeking. The rest of his life was filled with episodes of intense asceticism and poignant encounters with his disciples and supporters.

One of the most poignant moments in the story of Milarepa came right after he left Marpa for the first time. Instead of going off into a cave to meditate, he went back to his own village to visit his mother, the person whose anger and lust for revenge had set him in motion on the path to *nirvana*. He found that the roof of the house had fallen in, and in the center of the room were his mother’s bones. Many of these encounters are distilled in pithy and popular verses. The Kagyu School that stems from Milarepa and Marpa has had a number of important modern representatives, including Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, founder of the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado.

The Sakya School emerged in the eleventh century under the leadership of Drogmi (992–1074). Drogmi was the teacher of Konchog Gyeltsen who, in 1073, founded the Sakya Monastery that gave the school its name. This

school played an important role in negotiations between the Tibetans and the Mongols, who burst out of Mongolia in the thirteenth century and dominated much of Asia. Eventually, the Mongols converted to Tibetan Buddhism.

The thirteenth century was an important era in the history of Tibet, not just because of the coming of the Mongols, but because of the destruction of the Indian monasteries. Beginning in the thirteenth century, it was no longer possible for the Tibetans to travel to India whenever they needed a new teaching or needed to sort out some problem in the interpretation of teachings they had already received from India. You could say that it was the century when Tibetan Buddhism had to come of age and develop its own distinctive traditions. Part of this distinctive configuration of tradition had to do with the alliance between Tibetan *lamas* and the military power of the Mongols. The close relationship between the Tibetans and the Mongols continued to play an important role in Tibetan history. Today, this ancient alliance bedevils the relationship between Tibet and China, because as the Chinese consider themselves the heirs of the Mongol claims of influence over Tibet. The Sakya School is not as visible as other Tibetan schools in the West, but important Sakya centers can be found in different parts of North America.

The Geluk, or “Virtuous Way,” School (also known as the “Yellow Hats”) emerged in the early fourteen century under the leadership of the scholar Tsongkhapa. Tsongkhapa followed the example of the Indian scholar Atisha and tried to establish a pure form of Indian monastic practice. This involved an intense scholarly effort to codify not only the Tibetan approach to Buddhist philosophy but the stages of Tantric practice. Tsongkhapa founded several major monasteries in central Tibet, including his own home monastery, Ganden. These have been some of the most influential religious institutions in the history of Tibet. After the death of Tsongkhapa, the leadership of the Geluk School passed to the lineage of the Dalai Lamas. ■

Essential Reading

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, chapter 7, section 9.

Supplementary Reading

Lhalungpa, *The Life of Milarepa*.

Questions to Consider

1. Tibetan Buddhism is sometimes called *Lamaism* because of the importance of the *lama*—or teacher—in different lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Why is it so important for Buddhists, especially in Tibet, to orient themselves to a lineage of teachers?
2. What distinctive historical factors shaped the development of Tibetan Buddhism? How was Tibetan Buddhism shaped, for example, by the coming of the Mongols or by the unfortunate destruction of Buddhism in India?

The Dalai Lama

Lecture 18

When the Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his peaceful resistance to Chinese domination in Tibet, he became one of the foremost spokesmen and most visible symbols of Buddhism in the contemporary world.

For many, Tibetan Buddhism is personified by the figure of the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his peaceful resistance to Chinese rule in Tibet. From exile in India, the Dalai Lama has traveled the world to champion the Tibetan cause and present Buddhist solutions to many of the problems that plague the modern world. For us, he functions as a bridge between the ancient cultural traditions of Tibet and the complex challenges that face many modern Buddhists at the turn of the twenty-first century. The present Dalai Lama represents a line of incarnations that goes back to the fourteenth century. The transmission of authority by reincarnation is known as the *tulku* system.

The word *tulku* traditionally referred to the “manifestation body” of a Buddha (the body that a celestial Buddha manifests in this world). Here, it refers to the form a saint or religious leader adopts when he or she dies and is born again in another body. The *tulku* system is quite widespread in Tibetan Buddhism. It was used in the Kagyu School before the appearance of the Dalai Lamas, and it is used to one degree or another by all the schools.

There has been a lively controversy in recent years about the reincarnation of a Kagyu *lama* known as the Karmapa. The previous Karmapa was quite influential and charismatic. When he died about fifteen years ago, there was a dispute about his reincarnation. Some of his followers supported a candidate

Reflecting the traditional Buddhist concern for the removal of suffering, the Dalai Lama often begins his speeches by saying that all people have the right to pursue happiness and live in peace.



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The Potala Palace, an important focus of pilgrimage in the Tibetan tradition.

who lived in Bhutan. Others supported a candidate who lived in a monastery north of Lhasa in Tibet. About a year ago, the reincarnation from Tibet made a secret escape to Dharmasala, the home of the Dalai Lama in India, and presented himself to the Dalai Lama as the rightful heir to the Karmapa's authority. He appears to be a very charismatic figure, even though he is still quite young, and many people think he will grow into a position of great influence in the Tibetan community.

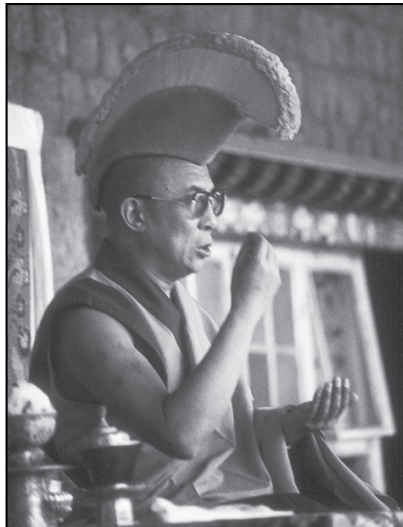
The first person to be recognized retrospectively as a Dalai Lama was a disciple of Tsongkhapa named Gendun Drubpa (b. 1391). The title *Dalai Lama* was given to the third member of the lineage, Sonam Gyatso (1543–1589), by the Mongol leader Altan Khan. The title means *Ocean Lama* and suggests that the Dalai Lama possesses an ocean of wisdom. With the title came Mongol support in the power struggles that eventually made the Dalai Lamas not only the leaders of the Geluk School, but the spiritual and temporal rulers of Tibet. The combination of spiritual and temporal authority is rare; most monks have avoided involvement in politics. But Buddhism has always had a political dimension, associated with the figure of the

dharmaraja (“righteous king.”) The Dalai Lama is one of the few figures in Buddhist history who has brought the ideal of righteous king and charismatic monk together in the same person.

The transition to temporal power was accomplished by the “Great Fifth” Dalai Lama (1617–1683). He outmaneuvered his rivals and established Geluk dominance of Tibet. As a symbol of his authority, he built the Potala Palace in Lhasa. This palace has been the traditional seat of the Dalai Lamas until the Chinese occupation of Tibet in the early 1950s. It still is a goal of pilgrimage and one of the most impressive Buddhist buildings in the world.

The first Dalai Lama to become enmeshed in international politics was the thirteenth (1876–1935). He tried to isolate Tibet from what was known as the “Great Game,” the political struggle between Russia and Britain for influence in Central Asia. But he could not keep the British at bay. Early in the twentieth century, the British sent a military expedition under the leadership of Colonel Younghusband to dictate

terms to the Tibetans. The British kept a diplomatic mission in Lhasa until the Chinese takeover of Tibet after World War II. The weight of international responsibility fell most heavily, however, on Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama.



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Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama.

The fourteenth Dalai Lama was discovered in Amdo, in northern Tibet, and was brought to Lhasa for his education. In 1950 Chinese armies attacked and occupied Tibet. In 1959, during a futile Tibetan uprising, the Dalai Lama fled Tibet and established a home in exile in the town of Dharamsala in northern India. He also has formulated a distinctively Buddhist response

to the problems of the modern world. Reflecting the traditional Buddhist concern for the removal of suffering, the Dalai Lama often begins his speeches by saying that all people have the right to pursue happiness and live in peace. He often stresses the interdependence of the human community, reflecting the image of interdependent co-arising that lies behind the second of the Noble Truths. When he offers positive solutions, he builds his moral arguments on the foundation of the *bodhisattva's* compassion, as expressed in two important traditional teachings: thinking of all living creatures as your mother from a previous life and the exchange of self and other. The Dalai Lama has made statements about many significant public issues, including human rights, the exploitation of the environment, and the oppression of minority peoples. Even on the most formal public occasions, the Dalai Lama's sense of compassion is vividly conveyed in the warmth of his speech and in the lightness of his smile. ■

Essential Reading

Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile*.

Supplementary Reading

Many of the Dalai Lama's speeches are available on Web sites, such as <http://www.dalailama.com>.

Questions to Consider

1. Is it surprising that a single person, such as the Dalai Lama, could become both the political and religious leader of a Buddhist country? How is the role of the Dalai Lama related to the traditional Buddhist image of a righteous king?
2. If you have an opportunity to read the public pronouncements of the Dalai Lama on the Internet or elsewhere, how do you think he has adapted Buddhist teaching for a modern Western audience?

The Origins of Chinese Buddhism

Lecture 19

Chinese people had become disillusioned with traditional Confucian values and saw Buddhism as a new way to solve enduring religious and cultural problems.

By the time Buddhism entered Tibet, Buddhists had been in China for more than 500 years. In this lecture, we will consider the process of transformation that took place as the first few generations of Chinese Buddhists struggled to understand the significance of this foreign tradition and adapt it to the distinctive needs of Chinese culture and Chinese people.

When the first Buddhist monks began to appear in the Chinese capital in the middle of the second century C.E., China was coming to the end of one of the most expansive periods in its history. During the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.), China was stable and prosperous: New lands were constantly being opened for development; advances were made in technology and the arts; and the upper classes experienced a time of optimism and luxury.

With the prosperity of Han China came the ideological synthesis known as Han Confucianism. Starting from the teaching of Confucius, scholars created a vision of heaven, earth, and human society as a single, harmonious whole. At the center of this cosmic order stood the ruler, observing the prescribed rituals and civilizing his people through the cultivation of proper behavior and moral virtue. Key Confucian values had to do with respect for elders (often referred to in English as “filial piety”), a sense of harmonious and respectful relationships between individuals (often referred to as “goodness,” or simply as “humanity”), and a reverence for all the polite rituals that tie human beings together in a prosperous and cooperative society.

In the middle of the second century, the Han synthesis began to fall apart. The emperor came under the influence of rival factions and no longer had the power or the moral force to guarantee the legitimacy of the state. As factions struggled for power, the peasants were increasingly alienated and oppressed. As intellectuals looked for new ways to diagnose and respond to the moral

malaise of the times, China was ripe for the introduction of new ideas, even ideas as foreign as the teaching of the Buddha.

As Buddhist monks and travelers made their way into China and began to communicate Buddhist ideas in a Chinese setting, they faced several difficult barriers. Sanskrit and Chinese were radically different as languages and as systems of thought. Chinese had nothing that corresponded to the complex psychological analysis in traditional Buddhism. Chinese social values emphasized the family, while Buddhism stressed the rejection of the family as part of the path to awakening.

The earliest Buddhist translators dealt with these problems in different ways. Sanskrit and Chinese terms were matched with one another so that key Buddhist ideas were matched with ideas already familiar to Chinese audiences. Offensive concepts often were omitted and aspects of the Indian tradition that were particularly congenial to Chinese tastes were emphasized. The *bodhisattva* Vimalakirti, for example, became a model of a sage who maintained his loyalty to the family while pursuing the path of the Buddha.

One of the key components in the Chinese adaptation of Buddhism was the relationship between Buddhism and Taoism. As the Han Dynasty disintegrated, Chinese intellectuals often turned for inspiration to the Taoist tradition since Taoism was comparable in antiquity to the tradition of Confucius. In contrast to the active, public virtues of Confucianism, Taoism advocated a strategy of inactivity and contemplation. The Taoist “Way,” or Tao, was down to earth, natural, harmonious, and inexpressible in words.

We can get a taste of Taoist teaching and begin to sense the kinship between Taoism and Buddhism from a few passages in the Tao-te Ching, one of the two fundamental texts of the Taoist tradition:

Chapter 1:

The Tao that can be told of is not the eternal Tao;

The name that can be named is not the eternal name.

The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the mother of all things.

—Chan, *A Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy*,
chapter 7 (“The Natural Way of Lao Tzu”)

The Taoists were skeptical of any attempt to express ultimate reality in conceptual terms. This skepticism fit very well with Buddhist attitudes toward Emptiness. But the Taoists also liked to think of the Tao, or the “Way,” as the ultimate source of things. The story of Malunkyaputta and the arrow showed that the Buddha was reluctant discuss the origin of things. He was much more concerned about analyzing the suffering we experience right now and finding a way to get rid of it. When Taoists talk about the Tao, they share a Buddhist reverence for simplicity and negation.

Chapter 4:

The Tao is empty like a bowl.
It may be used but its capacity is never exhausted.
It is bottomless, perhaps the ancestor of things.
It blunts its sharpness,
It unties tangles,
It softens its light.
It becomes one with the dusty world.

Chapter 11:

Thirty spokes are united around the hub to make a wheel,
But it is on its non-being that the utility of the carriage depends.
Clay is molded to form a utensil,
But it is on its non-being that the utility of the utensil depends.
Doors and windows are cut out to make a room,
But it is on its non-being that the utility of the room depends.
Therefore turn being to advantage, and turn non-being into utility.

We can imagine how Buddhist eyes must have lighted up when they heard these words!

The Taoist tradition had a strong tradition of sagehood, similar to the tradition of sainthood or monasticism in the Buddhist tradition.

Chapter 8:

The best [man] is like water.

Water is good; it benefits all things and does not compete with them.

It dwells in [lowly] places that all disdain.

That is why it is so near to Tao.

And the Taoist tradition presents an image of human perfection that seems quite similar to the Buddhist ideal of renunciation. This image is known as *wu-wei*, or “no action.” (The concept is described in *Zhuangzi Speaks: The Music of Nature*, Brian Bruya, trans., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992.)

Chapter 37:

Tao invariably takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone.

Chapter 40:

Reversion is the action of Tao.

Weakness is the function of Tao.

All things in the world come from being.

And being comes from non-being.

Chapter 43:

The softest things in the world overcome the hardest things in the world.

Non-being penetrates that in which there is no space.

Through this I know the advantage of taking no action.

Few in the world can understand the teaching without words and the advantage of taking no action.

The Taoist idea of no action can sometimes seem obscure, perhaps deliberately so, but it is not difficult to understand if you look at some typical Taoist examples. First, it involves a certain kind of detached attitude of mind, as in the story of the Taoist farmer who lost his horses. It also involves an ability

to see how certain problems can be solved best by creating an empty space or stepping out of the way and letting things take their natural course. A good example of this style of action is the Asian tradition of the martial arts, but it can also be associated with the work of a good teacher. The teacher teaches best who gets himself out of the way and creates the space for students to learn for themselves.

In the hard times that followed the fall of the Han Dynasty, Taoism offered an effective survival strategy for the beleaguered intelligentsia. But it also offered a rich body of words and ideas to express Buddhism in a Chinese way.

- The earliest Buddhist translations had a strong Taoist flavor.
- The word *dharma* was translated as Tao.
- The word *nirvana* was translated by the Taoist word *wu-wei*, or “no action.”

Chinese Buddhism, especially in its contemplative aspects, often reflects this combination of Taoist and Buddhist values. Some of the changes that took place in Buddhism when it was expressed in Chinese terms included: Taoists and Buddhists shared a similar ideal of sagehood; the sage was detached from the ordinary concerns of the world; the sage harmonized with the Tao by avoiding extremes and seeking a balanced way of life, similar to the Buddhist Middle Path; Taoism made Buddhism much more pragmatic and down-to-earth; and Taoism made Buddhism more respectful of natural ways of living; nature became an important concept in Chinese Buddhism as it never had been in India. As a result, Buddhism became much more amenable to the possibility of sudden enlightenment. ■

Essential Reading

Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, chapters 1–3.

Supplementary Reading

Chan, *A Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy*, chapter 7 (“The Natural Way of Lao Tzu”), chapter 19 (“Neo-Taosim”), chapter 21 (“Seng-chao’s Doctrine of Reality”).

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 8.

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, Chinese selections in chapter 8.

Questions to Consider

1. It is sometimes said that Buddhists do not seek converts for their tradition, yet Buddhism spread aggressively through the countries of Asia, even to countries as remote and self-confident as China. Why did Buddhists feel such an impulse to spread their faith?
2. The relationship between Taoism and Buddhism in China raises major questions about cultural influence and religious change. Why were Buddhists and Taoists able so readily to adopt each other’s ways of looking at the world? What does it tell us about the character of both traditions?

The Classical Period of Chinese Buddhism

Lecture 20

After a process that lasted a few centuries, Buddhism in China was no longer perceived as being a foreign religion.

Chinese people began to look for ideas in Buddhism to solve problems in their lives. The barbarian kings, who dominated northern China, knew very little about Chinese civilization. They found Buddhism an attractive religion, because it gave them a set of values that was not particularly associated with any specific Chinese group but had broad appeal for their Chinese subjects. Chinese intellectuals found that the relationship between Buddhism and Taoism offered a model to escape the sufferings of life while responding to the traditional concerns and interests of Chinese life.

In his account of Buddhism during the T'ang Dynasty (618–907), Arthur Wright said: “By the eighth century, Buddhism was fully and triumphantly established throughout China. Its canons were revered, its spiritual truths unquestioned. It marked and influenced the lives of the humble and the great and affected every community, large and small, in the empire of the T'ang.” This lecture will attempt to convey the richness and complexity of T'ang Dynasty Buddhism by focusing on three areas of Buddhist life: The schools of Chinese Buddhist philosophy, (2) devotion to the celestial *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara (Kuan-yin) and the celestial Buddha Amitabha, and (3) Buddhist influence on Chinese literature and the arts.



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Figure of Kuan-yin, a powerfully attractive dimension of Buddhism to many Chinese people.

The T'ang Dynasty saw the emergence of several indigenous Chinese Buddhist philosophical schools. One of the earliest and most influential

of these schools was named T'ien-t'ai ("Heavenly Terrace") after the mountain where the school was founded. Concerned about the confusing diversity of Indian Buddhist doctrine, the founder of the school Chih-i developed a system of classification, associating different teachings with different audiences and different periods in the Buddha's life. Chih-i's approach to Emptiness was expressed in "the perfect harmony of the Three Levels of Truth": all phenomena are empty (the Truth of Emptiness), all phenomena exist dependently (the Temporary Truth), and all phenomena are both empty and dependent (the Truth of the Mean). He also developed a doctrine of "three thousand worlds immanent in an instant of thought."

The Hua-yen ("Flower Garland") School was founded by Fa-tsang (643–712). The name of the Hua-yen School came from a corpus of Indian Mahayana *sutras* known as the *Avatamsaka*, or "Flower Garland." These sutras conveyed a positive image of Emptiness as the mutual interpenetration of all phenomena. The doctrine of this school is sometimes called the "Three Musketeers philosophy," because it pictures the cosmos as "all in one and one in all." The Indian example of this doctrine is "Indra's net": a network of jewels in which each jewel reflects the light from every other jewel in the net. Like the T'ien-t'ai, this school had important influences on both Buddhist thought and the arts.

The relationship between Buddhism and Taoism offered a model to escape the sufferings of life.

The Ch'an ("Meditation") School gave a distinctive Chinese interpretation to the practice of meditation. The Ch'an School eventually gave rise to the Zen School in Japan. The Ch'an School is traced to the legendary Indian saint Bodhidharma (fl. 460–534). It began to take on a Chinese character in the hands of Hung-jen (601–674) and, particularly, in the hands of his disciples, Shen-hsiu (605?–706) and Hui-neng (638–713). One version of the conflict between these two disciples is found in *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch*. Hui-neng advocated a position of sudden awakening, while Shen-hsiu advocated gradual awakening.

In response to a challenge from the master to write a short verse expressing his understanding of awakening, Shen-hsiu wrote:

The body is the tree of perfect wisdom
The mind is the stand of a bright mirror.
At all times diligently wipe it.
Do not allow it to become dusty.

Hui-neng replied:

Fundamentally perfect wisdom has no tree.
Nor has the bright mirror any stand.
Buddha-nature is forever clear and pure.
Where is there any dust?

—Chan, *A Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy*, chapter 26

The Ch'an tradition's distrust of words, its love of paradox, and its emphasis on direct, person-to-person transmission of insight had much in common with Taoism.

Mahayana devotional traditions also had great influence during the T'ang Dynasty. The Ching-t'u ("Pure Land") School was popular not only among the common people but also among the elite. For peasants and villagers, the promise of salvation in Amitabha's land held out hope for a future life. For the elite, it offered a type of contemplation that was very different from the austere practice of Cha'n, as in the words of Tao-ch'o (d. 645):

Suppose a man in an empty and distant place encounters a bandit who, drawing his sword, comes forcefully and directly to kill him. This man runs straight on, looking ahead to cross a river...

So also is the practitioner. When he is contemplating Amita Buddha, he is like the man contemplating the crossing. The thought is continuous, no others being mingled with it.

—deBary, ed., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, p. 385

For many people, the cult of such *bodhisattvas* as Avalokiteshvara (Kuan-yin) promised not just rebirth in another world but direct assistance with the concerns of this life. Avalokiteshvara, or Kuan-yin, came to be pictured as a compassionate mother holding a child. Kuan-yin was worshipped particularly for help bearing children.

Buddhist values had broad influence on Chinese literature and the arts. The T'ang Dynasty is known for lyric poetry of exquisite sensitivity. Many of the best T'ang poets either were Buddhist themselves or were influenced by the Buddhist values of wisdom and compassion. The poet who is known simply as Cold Mountain wrote some of the Buddhist tradition's finest contemplative verses about nature. For example:

As for me, I delight in the everyday Way,
 Among mist-wrapped vines and rocky caves.
 Here in the wilderness I am completely free,
 With my friends, the white clouds, idling forever.
 There are roads, but they do not reach the world;
 Since I am mindless, who can rouse my thoughts?
 On a bed of stone I sit, alone in the night,
 While the round moon climbs up Cold Mountain."

—Watson, trans., *Cold Mountain: 100 Poems by the T'ang Poet Han-shan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 67

Wang Wei gave poetic expression to the three levels of truth in the T'ien-t'ai. For example:

Empty hills, no one in sight,
 only the sound of someone talking;
 late sunlight enters the deep wood,
 shining over the green moss again.

—Watson, *Chinese Lyricism: Shih Poetry from the Second to the Twelfth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), p. 173 ■

Essential Reading

Wright, *Buddhism in Chinese History*, chapters 4–5.

Supplementary Reading

Chan, *A Sourcebook of Chinese Philosophy*, chapters 24–26.

Watson, *Cold Mountain*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why was Buddhism so appealing to the Chinese literati?
2. How did the encounter with Taoism transform the Buddhist tradition?

The Origins of Japanese Buddhism

Lecture 21

The indigenous Japanese tradition known as Shinto, or “the Way of the Gods,” was codified to respond to Buddhism, or “the Way of the Buddha.”

Buddhism entered Japan as early as the year 535 from Korea, at a time when the Japanese were suffering from some of the same difficulties the Chinese had experienced a few centuries earlier, during the fall of the Han Dynasty. Both Korea and China had recently been unified, while Japan itself was still in a state of feudal warfare. There was a sense that the Japanese needed a new strategy and a new system of values to organize the affairs of the nation. To find an effective model, the Japanese turned to China. In China, they found a combination of Confucianism and Buddhism, and they appropriated Buddhist rituals and values to help reorganize and focus the energies of the Japanese state. This meant that the process of adaptation in Japan took a very different turn than it had in China. When the first Buddhist monks from India traveled across the trade routes from Central Asia, the old Confucian synthesis was in disgrace. The emperor, who functioned as the center of the Confucian system, had lost control of the country and no longer commanded respect. When the Buddhist monks looked for a vocabulary to express Buddhism in a Chinese way, they formed a natural alliance with Taoism. The idioms of the two traditions may have been different, but it was not a major leap for a Taoist intellectual to think that Buddhism offered the same culture of withdrawal—or even the same culture of non-being—that he found in the texts of the Taoist tradition.

In Japan, the pressing questions were quite different: The Japanese wanted to know how Buddhism could strengthen the power of the emperor, and they wanted to know how Buddhism could make peace, not with a group of Taoist intellectuals, but with an indigenous religious tradition that, in many ways, was distinctively Japanese.

This indigenous tradition is what we know today as Shinto, or “the Way of the Gods,” in contrast to Buddhism, which is “the Way of the Buddha.” You can understand Shinto as the indigenous nature and spirit worship of Japan. It often is associated with sacred places, such as Mount Fuji, and with the powerful phenomena of nature, such as the sun. The list of possible deities includes not just the forces of nature, but anything that has superior power, including the ancestors and the emperor. These deities are known as *kami* (a word that we know in English in the term *kamikaze*, or “divine wind”). We can understand the way a sophisticated practitioner of Shinto would perceive the *kami* by considering a short passage from the work of Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), a well-known eighteenth-century interpreter of Shinto.

I do not yet understand the meaning of the term *kami*. Speaking in general, however, it may be said that *kami* signifies, in the first place, the deities of heaven and earth that appear in the ancient records and also the spirits of the shrines where they are worshipped.

It is hardly necessary to say that it includes human beings. It also includes such objects as birds, beasts, trees, plants, seas, mountains, and so forth. In ancient usage, anything whatsoever which was outside the ordinary, which possessed superior power, or which was awe-inspiring was called *kami*. Eminence here does not refer merely to the superiority of nobility, goodness, or meritorious deeds. Evil and mysterious things, if they are extraordinary and dreadful, are called *kami*. It is needless to say that among human beings who are called *kami* the generations of sacred emperors are all included.

—deBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p. 24

The most important *kami* in the Japanese tradition is the sun goddess, Amaterasu. The rising sun is the symbol of Japan, and the power of the sun goddess is understood as being present in the lineage of the emperors. To get a visceral sense of the Japanese feeling for the rising sun, you can imagine what it would be like to make the pilgrimage to the top of Mount Fuji, during the summer climbing season, when the snow fields recede enough to clear a path to the top. Climbers approach the summit late in the afternoon, then wait overnight in a mountain hut to greet the sun as it rises

out of the Pacific Ocean. Pilgrims say that it is an “awesome” sight, in the way we speak of “awe” in the study of religion: It is mysterious, powerful, almost overwhelming.

The presence of Shinto posed a challenge to Buddhism in Japan. Were the Shinto and Buddhist deities rivals, or were they, in some way, manifestations of the same power? When Buddhism first entered Japan, some perceived it as a threat, but the two traditions were eventually perceived as complementary; the *kami* and the Buddhas could be worshipped together.

One of the most important figures in the early history of Japanese Buddhism was Prince Shotoku. As the regent during the reign of his aunt, the Empress Suiko, Shotoku led Japan through a process of political reorganization. He changed the ranks in the court to conform to a Chinese model. He reformed the principles of etiquette, adopted the Chinese calendar (so that the rituals of state could be carried out at the appropriate times), built highways to tie the empire together, established a system of government chronicles, and went on a building campaign to promote the worship of the Buddha. Most of Shotoku’s reforms grew out of the Confucian values that he found in China. The Chinese themselves always seemed to rediscover these values whenever a new dynasty tried to draw China together into a unified empire. Shotoku also was a convinced and devout Buddhist. He felt that Buddhism could also be used to unify the nation and promote the welfare of the Japanese people.

Prince Shotoku expressed his Confucian and Buddhist values in a manifesto called the “Seventeen-Article Constitution.” The first article shows the influence of the Confucian concept of a harmonious society:

Harmony is to be valued, and avoidance of wanton opposition is to be honored. All men are influenced by partisanship, and there are few who are intelligent. Hence there are some who disobey their lords and fathers, or who maintain feuds with the neighboring villages. But when those above are harmonious and those below are friendly, and there is concord in the discussion of business, right views of things spontaneously gain acceptance. Then what is there which cannot be accomplished?

The second article shows the influence of Buddhism:

Sincerely reverence the three treasures. The three treasures, viz., Buddha, the Law, and the Monastic orders, are the final refuge of the four generated beings, and are the supreme objects of faith in all countries. Few men are utterly bad. They may be taught to follow it. But if they do not betake to the three treasures, wherewithal shall their crookedness be made straight?

—deBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p. 50

During the Nara Period (710–784, named after the city that served as its capital), less than a century after the death of Shotoku, Buddhism effectively became a state religion. Emperor Shomu (r. 724–749) sponsored a series of building projects that gave special prominence to Buddhism as an instrument of national policy. He constructed Todai-ji (the Great Eastern Temple) as a symbol of the relationship between Buddhism and the Japanese state. The temple is said to be the largest wooden building in the world. It houses a colossal bronze statue of the Buddha known as Dainichi (“Great Illumination”). This is the Japanese version of Vairochana, the Buddha of the Sun. According to tradition, the emperor sent messengers to the shrine of Amaterasu in Ise to seek her permission to erect the statue of Vairochana. The message that came back suggested that the Sun Buddha was the Buddhist counterpart of the Sun Goddess.

But the Buddhism of the Nara Period was not merely an expression of imperial policy. The Nara emperors also sponsored serious monastic practice and attempted to introduce some of the philosophical traditions that were then common in China. One of these was the Sanron, or “Three Treatise,” School, which was based on the teaching of Nagarjuna as it had been transmitted to China by the great Chinese translator Kumarajiva. Another was the Hosso or Yogachara School that had been introduced to China by Hsuan-tsang. The Nara Period also saw the formation of a Japanese version of the Chinese Hua-yen, or “Flower Garland,” School, known in Japan as Kegon. There also was strong interest in a few key Mahayana *sutras*, particularly a text known as the Golden Light *sutra*. This text presented the Mahayana in a way that was quite similar to the teaching of the Lotus *sutra*: It stressed the ideal of

the *bodhisattva* and the doctrine of Emptiness. One of its most attractive features was the prominence it gave to the role of the king. At the end of the Nara Period, the capital was moved to Kyoto and Japan entered the Heian Period (794–1185), a time of peace, prosperity, and courtly sophistication.

The Heian Period produced two important Buddhist schools. Kukai or Kobo Daishi (774–835) founded the Shingon (“True Word”) School. Kukai traveled to China to find an authentic form of Buddhist practice. In the Chinese capital, he encountered Chen-yen, a Chinese version of the Mantrayana, or “Vehicle of Powerful Words.” The word *Shingon* is the Japanese form of the Chinese word that means Mantrayana. Kukai founded a monastery on Mount Koya that still serves as the administrative and religious center of the Shingon School. The elaborate, esoteric rituals of Shingon had immense appeal in the Heian court.

Saicho or Dengyo Daishi (762–822) founded the Tendai School, the Japanese version of the Chinese T’ien-t’ai School. Like Chih-i, the founder of the T’ien-t’ai School, Saicho stressed the importance of the Lotus *sutra*. He used the teaching of “one vehicle” as a unifying principle, with political as well as religious significance.

The significance of this concept is evident in his “Vow of Uninterrupted Study of the Lotus Sutra”:

The Disciple of the Buddha and student of the One Vehicle this day respectfully affirms before the Three Treasures that the saintly Emperor, on behalf of Japan and as a manifestation of his unconditional compassion, established the Lotus Sect and had the Lotus Sutra, its commentary, and the essays on Concentration and Insight copied and bound, together with hundreds of other volumes and installed them in seven great temples. Constantly did he promote the Single and Only Vehicle, and he united all the people so that they might ride together in the ox-cart of the Mahayana to the ultimate destination, enlightenment.

—deBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, pp. 128–129

The Tendai School included many different varieties of Buddhist practice. When the Heian Period ended and the need for new approaches to Buddhist practice arose, the variety of the Tendai School was a source of the most innovative new teachings. ■

Essential Reading

Robinson and Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion*, chapter 10.

Supplementary Reading

Earhart, *Japanese Religion*, chapters 1–9.

Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism*, Japanese selections in chapter 8.

Questions to Consider

1. The introduction of Japan challenges us to think again about continuity and change. What new themes emerge in the formation of Japanese Buddhism?
2. How does the relationship with Shinto and with the emperor give a new flavor to Japanese Buddhism? What precedents have we seen for these changes in previous encounters between Buddhism and indigenous cultures in other countries of Asia?

Honen, Shinran, and Nichiren

Lecture 22

During the Kamakura Period, Japan suffered wide social and political unrest, in part because of the military threat of the Mongol invasion. Some Buddhist thinkers began to doubt whether it was possible to practice Buddhism successfully in such a “degenerate age” (*mappo*).

After the gentle sophistication and refinement of life in the Heian Period, the Kamakura Period (1192–1333) brought an experience of great turbulence and danger. Feudal armies roamed the countryside as different clans battled for control. After years of conflict, a single clan managed to defeat its rivals and establish a military government in Kamakura. The turbulence of the Kamakura Period brought a sense of pessimism to the practice of Buddhism, but it also brought opportunity. Buddhist thinkers returned to the ancient Buddhist idea of a degenerate age (*mappo*—the degenerate age of the *dharma*), when it was no longer possible for people to hope for salvation in a traditional way. Their sense of crisis brought new urgency to Buddhist practice and changed the face of Buddhism in Japan.

The Pure Land Tradition of Honen (1133–1212) and Shinran (1173–1262) responded to this sense of crisis. In the Heian Period, devotion to Amitabha or Amida Buddha had been just one option among many in the religious synthesis of Tendai Buddhism. As the power of the Heian court declined and the national crisis deepened, a number of Tendai monks turned to the streets to bring Amida’s salvation to the common people. Kuya (903–972) was known as “the saint of the streets” because he danced through city and town chanting the name of Amida and singing simple songs in praise of Amida’s paradise. A key part of Kuya’s practice was to chant the phrase: “*Namu Amida Butsu*,” which means “Homage to Amida (or Amitabha) Buddha.” This phrase is called the *nembutsu* and is understood as the way to gain access to Amida Buddha’s compassion. It was not until the time of Honen, however, that the Pure Land tradition began to function as a separate sect. Honen believed that it was no longer possible to rely on one’s own efforts to achieve salvation. The only hope of salvation lay in complete reliance on the grace of Amida Buddha. The distinctive character of Honen’s teaching

is most evident in his “One-Page Testament,” delivered to his disciples two days before he died:

The method of final salvation that I have propounded is neither a sort of meditation, such as has been practiced by many scholars in China and Japan, nor is it a repetition of the Buddha’s name by those who have studied and understood the deep meaning of it. It is nothing but the mere repetition of the “*Namu Amida Butsu*,” without a doubt of his mercy, whereby one may be born into the Land of Perfect Bliss. The mere repetition with firm faith includes all the practical details, such as the three-fold preparation of mind and the four practical rules. If I as an individual had any doctrine more profound than this, I should miss the mercy of the two honorable ones, Amida and Shaka [the historical Buddha and Shakyamuni], and be left out of the vow of Amida Buddha. Those who believe this, though they clearly understand all the teachings Shaka taught throughout his whole life, should behave themselves like simple-minded folk, who know not a single letter, or like ignorant monks or nuns whose faith is implicitly simple. Thus, without pedantic airs, they should fervently practice the repetition of the name of Amida, and that alone.

—deBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, pp. 208–209.

Shinran adopted Honen’s teaching and pushed it to a radical extreme. Like his teacher Honen, Shinran was banished from Kyoto for disturbing the established religious order. His sect, known as the Jodo Shinshu, or “True Pure Land Sect,” became the most important of the Pure Land sects and is the most popular form of Buddhism in contemporary Japan. He expressed his faith in Amida in the following way:

If even a good man can be reborn in the Pure Land, how much more so a wicked man!

People generally think, however, that if even a wicked man can be reborn in the Pure Land, how much more so a good man! This latter view may at first sight seem reasonable, but it is not in accord with

the purpose of the Original Vow, with faith in the Power of Another. The reason for this is that he who, relying on his own power, undertakes to perform meritorious deeds, has no intention of relying on the Power of Another and is not the object of the Original Vow of Amida. Should he, however, abandon his reliance on his own power and put his trust in the Power of Another, he can be reborn in the True Land of Recompose.

—deBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p. 217

There has been a strong movement in recent years to make Shinran's works available in English and bring the Jodo Shinshu tradition into dialogue with contemporary Christian theologians. Often this dialogue focuses on the mechanism of faith and the Original Vow of Amida Buddha. In this respect, it is quite similar to some of the concerns expressed in Protestant Christianity, in which the focus of energy (and the focus of anxiety) lies on the intersection of grace and faith. According to the traditional notion of *nirvana*, a Buddha achieves *nirvana* and escapes the cycle of reincarnation, but he leaves behind relics to be worshipped and teachings to guide others to *nirvana*. In the Mahayana, it was understood that *bodhisattvas* made vows that would continue to influence the lives of believers after the *bodhisattvas* themselves had attained Buddhahood. These vows functioned like the Christian concept of grace. The vows had power, and it was possible for everyone to plug into this power by chanting the Buddha's name and opening themselves up to receive the Buddha's compassion. To have faith in the Buddha's compassion required a sense of self-abandonment. The believer becomes identified with Amida as Amida's heart and mind move through the believer's heart and mind. This is evocative of the Christian axiom: "It is not I who act, but Christ in me."

The only hope of salvation lay in complete reliance on the grace of Amida Buddha.

Another key reformer in the Kamakura Period was Nichiren (1222–1281), one of the few people who can appropriately be called a Buddhist "prophet." Like Honen, Nichiren was trained as a monk at the home of the Tendai School in Kyoto. He also developed a new teaching to respond to the difficulties

of the times. But unlike Honen, Nichiren returned to the basic teaching of the Tendai School. He felt that the Lotus *sutra* was the key to the Buddha's teaching, and he preached that Japan could be saved only by reliance on the Lotus *sutra*. This reliance was expressed by the phrase "*Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*" ("Homage to the Lotus Sutra"). The force of Nichiren's teaching is evident in his own words:

The Lord Shakyas proclaimed to all celestial beings that when, in the fifth five hundred years after his death, all the truths should be shrouded in darkness, the Bodhisattva of Superb Action should be commissioned to save the most wicked of men who were degrading the truth, curing the hopeless lepers by the mysterious medicine of the adoration of the Lotus of the Perfect Truth. Can this proclamation be a falsehood? If this promise be not in vain, how can the rulers of the people of Japan remain in safety, who, being plunged in the whirlpool of strife and malice, have rebuked, reviled, struck, and banished the messengers of the Tathagata and his followers commissioned by Buddha to propagate the Lotus of Truth?

When they hear me say this, the people will say that it is a curse; yet those who propagate the Lotus of Truth are indeed the parents of all men living in Japan...I, Nichiren, am the master and lord of the sovereign, as well as of the Buddhists of other schools. Notwithstanding this, the rulers and the people treat us maliciously. How should the sun and the moon bless them by giving light? Why should the earth not refuse to let them abide upon it?...Therefore, also, the Mongols are coming to chastise them. Even if all the soldiers from the five parts of India were called together, and the mountain of the Iron Wheel were fortified, how could they succeed in repelling the invasion? It is decreed that all the inhabitants of Japan shall suffer from the invaders. Whether this comes to pass or not will prove whether or not Nichiren is the propagator of the Lotus of Truth.

—deBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, p. 225



Corel Stock Photo Library.

The Great Buddha, or Daibutsu, in Kamakura, Japan, where it is a national treasure and historic landmark.

Nichiren did not hesitate to criticize his opponents, including both religious leaders, like Honen, and the emperor himself. He was banished and persecuted for his efforts, but the vigor and intensity of his message won many followers and continues to be a major part of the Buddhist scene in Japan today. The Nichiren tradition is present in America in a movement known as Soka Gakkai, and it produced important and lively new religions in Japan before and after the Second World War. Among these is a movement known as the Rissho Kosei-kai, founded by Reverend Niwano. This movement has played a strong role in international religious organizations, such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace. It organizes its worship and community life in a way that is reminiscent of Protestant Christianity. ■

Essential Reading

Earhart, *Japanese Religion*, chapter 10.

Supplementary Reading

deBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, chapters 10–11.

Questions to Consider

1. Honen, Shinran, and Nichiren were radical reformers. In what sense do you think that they were still working out of the original impulse that motivated the career of Siddhartha Gautama, the historical Buddha?
2. Do you think any of them went too far?

Zen

Lecture 23

The Japanese version of the Chinese meditative tradition known as Ch'an, Zen focuses on developing a direct, experiential awareness of Emptiness.

Before we move on to the last topic in our discussion of Japanese Buddhism, we should pause for a moment and consider how far we have come from the serene, solitary figure of Siddhartha Gautama to the fiery devotion of Shinran and the passionate political denunciations of Nichiren. Do you think that the Buddhism of Honen, Shinran, and Nichiren has changed so much that the tradition is no longer recognizable? Some people would say this is true. Others would say that beneath the differences in doctrine and tone lie some of the fundamental convictions of the Buddhist tradition. Either way, these new traditions challenge us to think again about the meaning and scope of the Buddha's teaching. These traditions also prepare us to think in new ways about the historical and religious significance

of Zen in Japan. Like these other movements, Zen was a product of the distinctive religious climate of the Kamakura Period.

**To begin thinking about Zen,
or to begin experiencing it, you
can start with the most basic
form of mental concentration.**

The Zen tradition traces its roots to the Ch'an tradition in China and, through Ch'an, to the meditative traditions of India.

The word *Zen* is sometimes said to be a Japanese mispronunciation of a Chinese mispronunciation of an Indian word that means something like "meditation." The Indian word actually is *jhana*, a word that can be translated as "concentration" or "trance." *Jhana*, or *dhyana*, in Sanskrit, corresponds to the mental concentration (*samadhi*) that plays such a crucial role in the traditional Indian path to *nirvana*.

To begin thinking about Zen, or to begin experiencing it, you can start with the most basic form of mental concentration. Sit still on a cushion or in a chair, fold your hands gently in your lap, and concentrate on your breath. As you breathe, allow thoughts to dissipate and let the mind become calm. The goal of this process is to achieve awakening in the Mahayana sense, that is, to achieve an awareness of Emptiness. The Zen tradition stresses that this awareness cannot be achieved conceptually and it cannot be expressed in words; it has to be achieved with a person's whole being. And it has to be transmitted from teacher to student through a process of direct experience.

Zen took shape as a separate sect during the Kamakura Period, under the influence of two forceful personalities. Like many of the Kamakura reformers, Eisai (1141–1215) began his training in the Tendai School on Mount Hiei in Kyoto. After becoming disenchanted with Tendai practice, he traveled to China to learn the traditional discipline of meditation. In China, he studied Ch'an and returned to Japan in 1191 as a full-fledged master in the Rinzai School. When he found that Kyoto was hostile to his new teaching, he moved to the new center of political power in Kamakura and began to preach Zen to the military warlords. His stress on sturdy self-reliance and on fearlessness in the face of death won him many disciples among the military classes and made Zen an important component in the martial arts. The Rinzai School developed the discipline of *koan* practice to achieve an experience of sudden awakening. A *koan* is a puzzle that is meant to stop the mind in its tracks. Typical *koans* are the questions: "Does a dog have Buddha nature?" or "What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Dogen (1200–1253) also began his career on Mount Hiei and followed Eisai's footsteps to China. When Dogen returned from China, he established the Soto (Chinese: Ts'ao-tung) School of Zen. Dogen thought that *koan* practice put too much stress on achieving awakening as if it were different from ordinary experience; he emphasized the practice of *zazen*, or "sitting meditation," as an end in itself. Dogen criticized the idea of a "degenerate age," arguing that all moments are equally reflective of Emptiness.

A classic expression of this doctrine is found in his statement on “Being-Time”:

Know that in this way there are myriads of forms and hundreds of grasses throughout the entire earth, and yet each grass and each form itself is the entire earth. The study of this is the beginning of practice.

When you are at this place, there is just one grass, there is just one form; there is understanding of form and there is no-understanding of form; there is understanding of grass and no-understanding of grass. Since there is nothing but just this moment, the being-time is all the time there is. Grass-being, form-being are both time.

Each moment is all being, is the entire world. Reflect now whether any being or any world is left out of the present moment.

—Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, p. 77

One of Dogen’s most powerful statements about Zen is the Genjo Koan, or “Actualizing the Fundamental Point”:

To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly...

Enlightenment is like the moon reflected on the water. The moon does not get wet, nor is the water broken. Although its light is wide and great, the moon is reflected even in a puddle an inch wide. The whole moon and the entire sky are reflected in dewdrops on the grass, or even in one drop of water.

—Tanahashi, ed., *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen*, pp. 70–71

The Zen tradition has had broad influence on the arts in Japan, including the martial arts. The source of Zen influence is the concept that all of reality is reflected in a single moment of experience. The Zen spirit is often expressed in a process of graceful subtraction, where a few simple elements are allowed to stand for the totality of experience. One of the most striking examples of the artistic expression of Zen is the rock and sand garden at Ryoanji in Kyoto. The garden was constructed at the end of the fifteenth or the beginning of the sixteenth century. It consists of fifteen stones in a bed of white gravel. A monk's first encounter with the concept of meditation in such a garden would be to carefully maintain it—to sweep and rake it in a ritualized, contemplative way. But the garden can also convey a sense of quiet, simplicity, and stillness to those who simply sit and contemplate it.

Another important example is a famous three-line verse from the Zen poet Matsuo Basho (1644–1694):

Old pond,
frog jumps in,
sound of water.

—Hiroaki Sato, *One Hundred Frogs* (New York: Weatherhill, 1995)

The three lines correspond to the three levels of the truth in the T'ien-t'ai system. Chih-i said that there were three ways of looking at the world: the truth of Emptiness, the temporary or conventional truth, and the truth of the mean (the combination of the ultimate and the conventional). The first line represents the truth of Emptiness: the old pond. The frog represents the conventional or natural event. The result of the frog's leap is the sound of water—the combination of the ultimate and the conventional. It is sometimes said that these lines sum up the whole meaning of Buddhism. That may be an exaggeration, but there is no question that they distill the Zen (and T'ien-t'ai) perception of Emptiness to a fine point of aesthetic concentration. It is possible to take a step further and interpret the frog, not merely as a conventional event, but as Basho himself, as the poet acts, like a Zen master, to place a moment of awakening in the still pond of our consciousness.

Basho's most famous work, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, shows the same sense of aesthetic concentration in such verses as the following:

In the silence of an old temple
 A cicada's voice
 Splits the rock.
 I am awestruck
 To hear a cricket singing
 In the cavity of an old helmet.

—Translation adapted from Basho,
The Narrow Road to the Deep North ■

Essential Reading

Shunryu, Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*.

Supplementary Reading

Basho, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*.

deBary, ed., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, chapter 12.

Suzuki, *Zen and Japanese Culture*.

Questions to Consider

1. After the radical changes brought about by Honen, Shinran, and Nichiren, Zen seems almost to be a return to the primitive spirit of ancient Buddhism. In what sense is this true? Are there some ways in which this is an illusion?
2. How does Zen help us to understand what it means to know and be transformed by Emptiness?

Buddhism in America

Lecture 24

Buddhism has become a respected and significant part of American culture. ...The tradition that began on the plains of India 2,500 years ago has now been transformed in ways that would once have been unimaginable, but it still carries the sense of serenity and freedom that we associate with the Buddha himself.

As the story of Buddhism has unfolded over the course of these lectures, we have seen that Buddhism is an extraordinarily malleable and adaptable tradition. From India, it spread into just about every corner of Asia. It has transformed the civilizations it encountered, and it too has been transformed in ways that would have been unimaginable to its earliest adherents. It should come as no surprise to see that Buddhism today has become an influential part of the culture throughout Europe and the Americas. In this final lecture, we will consider some of the ways Buddhism has entered Western culture. We also will consider some of the ways this encounter has changed the Buddhist tradition itself.

The first serious scholarly contacts between Europeans and the Buddhists of South and Southeast Asia took place during the nineteenth century, as European colonial officials attempted to study the culture of the colonial population. An early precursor of this movement was the brilliant British scholar and jurist Sir William Jones (also known as “Oriental Jones”). Jones helped institutionalize the study of Sanskrit and classical Indian civilization in 1784, when he founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Buddhism was no longer a living tradition in India and remained largely unknown to Jones’s generation of British officials. The most important milestone in the early nineteenth-century study of Buddhism was Eugene Burnouf’s *L’introduction à l’histoire du buddhisme indien*, published in Paris in 1844. Burnouf’s book made Mahayana Buddhism available to Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and their circle of transcendentalists in Concord, Massachusetts.

In 1880, Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steele Olcott, the founders of the American Theosophical Society, traveled to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and converted to Buddhism. To help Buddhists meet the criticism of Christian missionaries, Colonel Olcott produced a “Buddhist Catechism.” This statement of Buddhist principles had a powerful effect on the way Buddhists have constructed a distinctively “modern” Buddhism. Olcott criticized superstitious rituals as inauthentic Buddhism. He also criticized slavish dependence on authority, both human and divine. For Olcott, Buddhism had to do with self-reliance, achieving *nirvana* for oneself; he emphasized the

The appeal of Buddhism lies somewhere in the structure of the Four Noble Truths, between the conviction that everyone suffers and the conviction that there is a way to bring suffering to an end.

idea that the Buddha was concerned with a direct experience of *nirvana* in day-to-day life. His vision of Buddhism is sometimes said to be a form of “Protestant Buddhism.” Olcott was the son of a Protestant preacher, and he brought a certain kind of Protestant vision to what he believed religion ought to be.

brought a number of charismatic religious leaders from Asia, including Anagarika Dharmapala, a Theravada Buddhist from Ceylon. At the parliament, Soyen Shaku, a Rinzai Zen master from Japan, met the author and German émigré Dr. Paul Carus, who helped him bring Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki to North America to help propagate Zen. Suzuki’s work has been the avenue into Zen for several generations of American students.

American perceptions of Asian religions were radically transformed by the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The parliament

After the World Parliament of Religions, Asian Buddhists in North America took steps to organize their own religious communities. These communities have continued to flourish as the religious and ethnic makeup of American society has become more and more diverse. Chinese and Japanese Buddhist communities on the West Coast of the United States, and in Hawaii, have created new and fascinating Americanized Buddhist movements. Particularly venerable and successful is the organization of Jodo Shinshu Buddhists

known as the Buddhist Churches of America. Another intriguing example of Chinese Buddhism in America is the Hsi-lai Temple in Los Angeles, where Vice President Al Gore was involved in a controversial fundraising project. Comparable diversity is found among Buddhists from other parts of Asia, including Buddhists from Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Tibet, Mongolia, and Korea.

As Buddhism has spread across North America, it seems that almost every variety of Asian Buddhism has been adapted for an American audience. Zen centers were established in several places in North America, making it possible for American converts to receive training and assume positions of leadership. A *roshi* by the name of Shunryu Suzuki established the San Francisco Zen Center and trained a number of important disciples, including Richard Baker Roshi. Yasutani Roshi traveled widely in America and trained several disciples who went on to organize major Zen centers of their own.

The movement known as Sokai Gakkai has brought Nichiren's teaching of devotion to the Lotus *sutra* to a broad and diverse American audience and is particularly influential in the African American community. Tibetan Buddhism has been represented by all four major schools and many subvarieties. Among some of the most important have been: Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado and the Geshe Wangyal's Gelukpa meditation center in Washington, New Jersey.

To grasp the significance of Buddhism in American life, it is important not to stop with organized denominations and centers. Buddhism has also influenced literature and the arts. Many people first came into contact with Buddhism through the novels of Jack Kerouac and the Beat Poets, especially Gary Snyder. Another important text is *Siddhartha*, the novel by the German author Hermann Hesse. The African American author Charles Johnson has written novels that explore the implications of the change of consciousness that takes place when ex-slaves experience freedom. Buddhism weaves its way through these characters' lives and produces a distinctive image of enlightenment. Part of the strength of the Buddhist tradition has been its malleability. In principle it is impermanent, and it adapts easily to new situations.

If Buddhism is so flexible, why is it so attractive? You could say that the appeal of Buddhism lies somewhere in the structure of the Four Noble Truths, between the conviction that everyone suffers and the conviction that there is a way to bring suffering to an end. I am inclined to think that the appeal of Buddhism lies in the story of the Buddha himself, repeated and given new life in the stories of the Buddhists who have attempted to follow his example and seek Buddhahood in their own experiences. ■

Essential Reading

Fields, *How the Swans Come to the Lake*.

Supplementary Reading

Prebisch and Tanaka, *The Faces of Buddhism in America*.

Questions to Consider

1. What do you think has made Buddhism such an appealing tradition throughout Asia and now makes it so appealing in the West?
2. As Buddhism has evolved and changed, do you think the tradition has maintained its identity or has it compromised itself out of existence?

Timeline

Before the common era (B.C.E.)

- 1500–1000..... The earliest hymns of the Veda.
- 1000–500..... The classical Upanishads.
- 486..... Death of the Buddha
Siddhartha Gautama.
- c. 486..... First Buddhist Council.
- c. 386?..... Second Buddhist Council.
- 269–238..... Reign of King Asoka in India;
introduction of Buddhism to
Sri Lanka (Ceylon).
- 206..... Beginning of the Han Dynasty in China.

Common era (C.E.)

- First century Emergence of the Mahayana in India.
- c. 100..... Kushan Empire: Mathura and Gandhara
styles of Buddhist art.
- Second century..... Introduction of Buddhism to China;
Madhyamaka School developed by
Nagarjuna in India.
- 220..... End of the Han Dynasty in China.

Fourth century	Yogachara School developed by Asanga and Vasubandhu in India.
Fourth–sixth centuries.....	Gupta Dynasty in India.
460–534.....	Bodhidharma, founder of the Ch’an School in China.
Sixth century	Emergence of Tantra in India.
531–597.....	Chih-i, founder of T’ien-t’ai School in China.
574–622.....	Prince Shotoku establishes Buddhism in Japan.
601–674.....	Hung-jen, the fifth patriarch of Ch’an Buddhism.
c. 609–649.....	King Songtsen Gampo introduces Buddhism to Tibet.
618–907.....	T’ang Dynasty in China.
638–713.....	Hui-neng, the sixth patriarch of Ch’an Buddhism.
643–712.....	Fa-tsang, founder of the Hua-yen School in China.
710–784.....	Nara Period in Japan.
754.....	Accession of King Thrisong Detsen in Tibet.

762–822.....	Saicho, founder of the Tendai School in Japan.
774–835.....	Kukai, founder of the Shingon School in Japan.
c. 779.....	Samye Monastery founded in Tibet; Padmasambhava and Shantarakshita active in Tibet.
794–1185.....	Heian Period in Japan.
c. 836.....	Accession of King Langdarma in Tibet; end of the “First Diffusion of the <i>Dharma</i> .”
992–1074.....	Life of Drogmi, founder of the Sakya School in Tibet.
1022–1096.....	Life of Marpa, founder of the Kagyu School in Tibet.
1040–1123.....	Life of Milarepa.
1042.....	Indian scholar Atisha comes to Tibet; beginning of the “Later Diffusion of the <i>Dharma</i> ” in Tibet.
1133–1212	Honen, founder of a separate Pure Land School in Japan.
1141–1215.....	Eisai, founder of the Rinzai School of Zen in Japan.
1173–1262.....	Shinran, founder of the True Pure Land School in Japan.

1192–1333.....	Kamakura Period in Japan.
c. 1200.....	Destruction of Buddhism in India.
1200–1253.....	Dogen, founder of the Soto School of Japanese Zen.
1222–1281.....	Nichiren, founder of the Nichiren School in Japan.
1357.....	Birth of Tsongkhapa, founder of the Geluk School in Tibet.
1391.....	Birth of Gendun Drubpa, later recognized as the first Dalai Lama.
1617–1683.....	The “Great Fifth” Dalai Lama.
1644–1694.....	Matsuo Basho, Zen poet in Japan.
1844.....	Eugene Burnouf’s <i>L’introduction a l’histoire du buddhisme indien</i> , published in Paris.
1851–1868.....	Reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV) in Thailand.
1880.....	Madame Blavatsky and Colonel Olcott convert to Buddhism in Ceylon.
1893.....	World Parliament of Religions in Chicago.
1935.....	Birth of Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama.

- 1951..... Chinese occupation of Tibet.
- 1989..... Nobel Peace Prize presented to the
Dalai Lama.
- 1991..... Nobel Peace Prize presented to Aung
San Suu Kyi of Burma.

Glossary

Amida: the Japanese name for Amitabha Buddha.

Amitabha (“Infinite Light”): the Buddha who is the focus of devotion in Pure Land Buddhism.

Aniconic image: represents the Buddha by symbols, by places associated with his life, or by his absence.

Arhant ideal: the pursuit of *nirvana* for one’s own sake, in contrast to the *bodhisattva* ideal, in which the *bodhisattva* postpones *nirvana* to help others achieve the same goal.

Avalokiteshvara (“Lord Who Looks Down”): the celestial *bodhisattva* of compassion, known in China as Kuan-yin and in Tibet as Chenrezig.

Bodhicitta: the “mind of awakening,” cultivated by a *bodhisattva* through a combination of wisdom and compassion.

bodhisattva: a future Buddha or “Buddha-to-be” who postpones *nirvana* in order to help others achieve *nirvana*.

Bon: the indigenous religious tradition in Tibet.

Buddhist Churches of America: the American branch of the Jodo Shinshu or “True Pure Land” sect of Japanese Buddhism.

Celestial Buddhas and bodhisattvas: Buddhas or *bodhisattvas* who have achieved extraordinary powers. These powers make it possible for them to reside in the heavens (hence the name “celestial”) and to function as the Buddhist equivalents of Hindu gods.

Chakravartin: a “turner of the wheel” who becomes either a great king and turns the wheel of conquest or a religious teacher and turns the wheel of religious teaching.

Ch’an: the meditation school of Chinese Buddhism, precursor of Zen.

Ching-t’u (“Pure Land”) School: a school of Chinese Buddhism related to the Pure Land tradition in Japan.

Confucianism: a Chinese philosophical system that stresses values of political and social responsibility. It is traced to the philosopher Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.).

Degenerate Age of the Dharma (*mappo*): the view that conditions in the world have declined to such an extent that traditional means of Buddhist perfection are impossible; a key idea in several schools of Japanese Buddhism during the Kamakura Period.

Dharma (Pali *Dhamma*): the Buddha’s teaching.

Dharmaraja (Pali *Dhammaraja*): a “righteous king” who protects and promulgates the *dharma*.

Emptiness: the absence of identity in things, a fundamental teaching of Mahayana Buddhism.

Gandhara style: a style of Buddhist art that shows the influence of Greek craftsmen in the Hellenistic kingdoms in Afghanistan (c. 100 C.E.).

Geluk (dGe-lugs): one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, the school of the Dalai Lamas.

Gupta style: a style of Indian art associated with the Gupta Dynasty in north India (fourth to sixth centuries).

Han Confucianism: the Confucianism that was practiced during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) in China.

Hinayana: “Lesser Vehicle,” a term used in Mahayana literature to describe the teaching that preceded the Mahayana.

Hsi-lai Temple: a major Chinese Buddhist temple in Los Angeles.

Hua-yen (“Flower Garland”) School: a school of Chinese Buddhist philosophy founded by Fa-tsang (643–712).

Jataka tales: stories about the previous lives of the Buddha.

Jodo Shinshu: the “True Pure Land Sect” founded by Shinran (1173–1262) in Japan.

Kagyü (bKa’-rgyud): one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Kami: an indigenous deity in Japan.

Karma: a Sanskrit word that means “action.” Good actions bring a good rebirth, and bad actions bring a bad rebirth.

Kuan-yin: the Chinese name of Avalokiteshvara, the celestial *bodhisattva* of compassion.

Lama (bla-ma): a teacher in the Tibetan tradition.

Lotus *sutra*: an Indian Mahayana *sutra* that played a major role in the development of Chinese and Japanese Buddhism.

Madhyamaka: the “Middle Way” School of Mahayana philosophy, developed in India in the second or third century C.E. by the philosopher Nagarjuna.

Mahasamghika: the “Great Community,” a sectarian movement that is thought to be the forerunner of the Mahayana.

Mahayana: the “Great Vehicle,” a reform movement that appeared in the Buddhist community in India around the beginning of the common era. Eventually the Mahayana dominated the Buddhism of Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

Maitreya: a *bodhisattva* who is venerated throughout the Buddhist world as the Buddha of the future.

Mandala: a sacred circle used in Tantric Buddhist ritual.

Mañjushri (“Charming Splendor”): the celestial *bodhisattva* of wisdom and the patron deity of scholars in Mahayana Buddhism.

Mantra: a sacred phrase whose syllables are believed to have power in their own right.

Mantrayana: the “Mantra Vehicle,” a common term for Tantric Buddhism.

Mathura style: a style of Buddhist art associated with the region of Mathura in the Ganges Basin (c. 100 C.E.).

Meditation (*dhyani*) Buddhas: the five Buddhas who are associated with the five major points in a *mandala*.

Mt. Hiei: the home of the Tendai School in Japan.

Nembutsu: the phrase “*Namu Amida Butsu*” (“Homage to Amida Buddha”), used in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism to invoke the compassion of Amida (or Amitabha) Buddha.

Nirvana: cessation of suffering, the goal of Buddhist life.

Non-duality: a way of speaking about the doctrine of Emptiness in Mahayana Buddhism.

Nyingma (rNying-ma): one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Padmasambhava.

Om manipadme hum: a mantra used to invoke the power of the celestial *bodhisattva* Avalokiteshvara.

Pali: a language that is derived from Sanskrit and used in the scriptures of the Theravāda tradition in Southeast Asia.

Pali canon: the collection of Buddhist scriptures used by the Theravāda tradition.

Potala Palace: the palace of the Dalai Lamas in Tibet.

Prajna (Pali pañña): wisdom, a crucial component of the path that leads to *nirvana*.

Pure Land: a celestial paradise thought to be the home of Amitabha Buddha in the Mahayana tradition.

Renunciant: someone who has renounced the ordinary duties and responsibilities of Indian society to escape from the cycle of reincarnation.

Rinzai School: a school of Japanese Zen, founded by Eisai (1141–1215).

Sakya (Sa-skya): one of the four major schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Samadhi: mental concentration.

Samgha: the Buddhist community.

Samsara: the cycle of reincarnation.

Samye (bsam-yas): first Tibetan monastery and site of a famous debate that led to the acceptance of Indian Buddhism in Tibet.

Sanskrit: the language of ancient India.

Shingon (“True Word”) School: a school of Japanese Buddhism founded by Kukai or Kobo Daishi (774–835).

Shinto: “the Way of the Gods” as opposed to “the Way of the Buddha” in Japan.

Sila: moral precepts. Traditionally, lay people observe five precepts: no killing, no stealing, no lying, no abuse of sex, and no drinking intoxicants.

Soto School: a school of Japanese Zen founded by Dogen (1200–1253).

Sthaviravada: the “Doctrine of the Elders,” a sectarian movement that was the forerunner of Theravāda Buddhism.

Stupa: a reliquary mound originally used to contain the relics of the Buddha.

Sutra: a Buddhist scriptural text.

Tantra: the term originally means the warp in a piece of cloth, used to refer to a variety of Buddhism that appeared in India in the sixth century C.E.

Taoism: a Chinese religious and philosophical tradition that stresses the value of harmony with nature.

Tendai School: a school of Japanese Buddhism founded by Saicho or Dengyo Daishi (762–822).

Theravāda: the “Doctrine of the Elders,” the only surviving example of the eighteen *nikayas* or “schools” of traditional Buddhism. The Theravāda is now the dominant form of Buddhism in Southeast Asia.

Three Baskets (*tripitaka*): the three sections of the Buddhist scriptures.

Three Jewels: the Buddha, *Dharma*, and *Samgha*, also known as the three refuges.

Tibetan Book of the Dead: a manual for ritual and meditation to guide the consciousness of someone who has recently died through the afterlife.

T'ien-t'ai (“Heavenly Terrace”) School: a school of Chinese Buddhist philosophy founded by Chih-i (531–597).

Todai-ji: the Great Eastern Temple in Nara, Japan.

Tulku (sprul-sku): the Tibetan word *tulku* was used traditionally to refer to the “manifestation” body of a Buddha. Here, it refers to a saint or other religious leader who is recognized as being reborn in a new form.

Upanishad: the portion of the Veda that contained the most extensive speculation about the nature of reality and the doctrine of reincarnation.

Vairocana (“Radiant”) Buddha: one of the key Buddhas in Tantric Buddhism; played a particularly important role in the adaptation of Buddhism to Japan.

Vajrayana: “Diamond Vehicle,” a common term for Tantric Buddhism.

Veda: the most ancient and authoritative scriptures of the Hindu tradition.

Vedanta: another name for the Upanishads, the “end of the Veda.”

World Parliament of Religions: a meeting held in Chicago in 1893 that introduced many important Asian religious leaders to the West.

Wrathful Buddha: an image of the Buddha in destructive form, common in Tantric ritual and art.

Yab-yum: an image of a Buddha as the union of male and female, common in Tantric ritual and art.

Yogachara: the “Yoga Practice” School of Mahayana philosophy, founded in the fourth century by Asanga, with help from his brother Vasubandhu.

Zen: the meditation school of Japanese Buddhism.

Biographical Notes

Asoka: an Indian king (reigned 269–238 B.C.E.) who converted to Buddhism and became the prototype of a “righteous king” (*dharmaraja*).

Atisha (982–1054): an Indian scholar who played an important role in the “Later Diffusion of the *Dharma*” in Tibet.

Aung San Suu Kyi: the leader of a democratic protest movement in Burma and recipient of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize.

Basho, Matsuo (1644–1694): a well-known Zen poet in Japan.

Blavatsky, Madame Helena Petrova: co-founder of the American Theosophical Society with Colonel Henry Steele Olcott in 1875, an early convert to Buddhism.

Bodhidharma (fl. 460–534): an Indian saint who is said to be the founder of the Ch’an School in China.

Chih-i (538–597): founder of the T’ien-t’ai School in China.

Cold Mountain: a Chinese Buddhist poet who was active during the T’ang Dynasty.

Confucius (551–479 B.C.E.): a Chinese philosopher who was the founder of the Confucian tradition.

Dalai Lama: the spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet, thought by Tibetans to be the manifestation of the *bodhisattva* Chenrezig or Avalokiteshvara. Tenzin Gyatso, the current Dalai Lama, is the fourteenth holder of this lineage.

Dharmapala, Anagarika (b. 1864): a Theravāda Buddhist from Ceylon who helped introduce Theravāda Buddhism to North America at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.

Dogen (1200–1253): founder of the Soto School of Zen.

Drogmi (992–1074): founder of the Sakya School in Tibet.

Eisai (1141–1215): founder of the Rinza School of Zen.

Fa-tsang (643–712): founder of the Hua-yen (“Flower Garland”) School of Chinese Buddhist philosophy.

Great Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1683): the Dalai Lama who solidified the political power of the Geluk School in Tibet, builder of the Potala Palace in Lhasa.

Guru Rinpoche: another name for Padmasambhava.

Honen (1133–1212): a Pure Land reformer during the Kamakura Period in Japan.

Hsuan-tsang (596–664): a well-known Chinese pilgrim and philosopher who visited India in the early part of the seventh century and brought Yogachara philosophy back to China.

Hui-neng (638–713): a disciple of Hung-jen and sixth patriarch of a particular lineage of Ch’an Buddhism in China.

Hung-jen (601–674): the fifth patriarch of the Ch’an tradition in China.

Konchog Gyelpo (dKon-mchog rGyal-po): founded the Sakya Monastery in Tibet in 1073.

Kukai or **Kobo Daishi** (774–835): founder of the Shingon (“True Word”) School in Japan.

Kuya (903–972): “the Saint of the Streets,” an early advocate of Pure Land Buddhism in Japan.

Mahadeva: a monk whose scandalous behavior is said to have provoked the Second Buddhist Council.

Mahaprajapati: the Buddha’s great aunt, ordained as the first Buddhist nun.

Maitreya: the Buddha to come after Shakyamuni.

Manjushri: the celestial *bodhisattva* of wisdom.

Marpa (1012–1096): founder of the Kagyu or “Teaching Lineage” School in Tibet.

Milarepa (1040–1123): one of Tibet’s most beloved saints.

Mongkut, King of Thailand (r. 1851–1868), also known as King Rama IV: served as a monk for over twenty-five years before becoming king. As king, he instituted a major reform movement in the Thai *samgha*.

Nagarjuna (second or third century C.E.): founder of the Madhyamaka School of Buddhist philosophy in India.

Nichiren (1222–1281): Buddhist reformer during the Kamakura Period in Japan.

Olcott, Colonel Henry Steele: co-founder of the Theosophical Society with Madame Helena Petrova Blavatsky in 1875 and an early convert to Buddhism.

Padmasambhava (eighth century): a Tantric saint who played an important role in the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet during the “First Diffusion of the *Dharma*”; considered the founder of the Nyingma School in Tibet.

Saicho or Dengyo Daishi (762–822): founder of the Tendai School in Japan.

Shakyamuni: Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha of this historical era.

Shantarakshita (eighth century): an Indian scholar who participated in the founding of the first Tibetan monastery.

Shinran (1173–1262): a Pure Land reformer during the Kamakura Period in Japan.

Emperor Shomu (r. 724–749): the emperor who built the Great Eastern Temple in Nara and promoted Buddhism as state policy during the Nara Period (710–784).

Prince Shotoku (574–622): Japanese prince who was instrumental in the adoption of Buddhism as a form of national policy.

Shunryu Suzuki (1904–1971): established the San Francisco Zen Center and trained a number of important disciples, including Richard Baker Roshi.

Siddhartha Gautama: the name of the historical Buddha.

Songtsen Gampo (Srong-brtsan-sgam-po): king of Tibet from 627 to 649, credited with the introduction of Buddhism to Tibet.

Soyen Shaku: a Rinzai Zen master from Japan who brought Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki to North America after the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.

Suzuki, Daisetz Teitaro: an influential early spokesman for Zen Buddhism in North America.

Thrisong Detsen (Khri-srong-lde-brtsan): king of Tibet from 754 to 797, founded the first Tibetan Buddhist monastery and presided over a debate that led to the acceptance of Indian Buddhism in Tibet.

Trungpa Rinpoche, Chogyam: a modern leader of Tibetan Buddhism, founder of the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado.

Tsongkhapa (1357–1419): founder of the Geluk or “Virtuous Way” School (also known as the “Yellow Hats”) in Tibet.

Wang Wei: a Chinese Buddhist poet who was active during the T’ang Dynasty.

Wangyal, Geshe: founder of a Gelukpa meditation center in Washington, New Jersey.

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